

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 14

Return to the Grand Xia

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller...than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Homecoming

The world of the Grand Xia. Stillwater Commandery.

A spatial ripple appeared in the air above Serpentwing Lake. From within, out strode a plainly dressed youth, a snowy white hound by his side and a little azure serpent around his arm.

“We’re back.”

Ji Ning stared downwards at Serpentwing Lake. He murmured softly, “When I left here, I fled in such a pathetic state. But now...no one should even think about forcing me, Ji Ning, to leave again!”

Ning felt closer to this lake than anything else. If it hadn’t been because the Youngflame clan was so much more powerful than him back then, how could Ning have beared to part from it?

Swoosh. With a single step, Ning arrived within Brightheart Island, at the very center of Serpentwing Lake.

The buildings of Brightheart Island had all been rebuilt. There were quite a few servants and guards present. As Ning strolled forward through the sand, he quietly gazed at everything and everyone. His divine sense had long ago encapsulated the entire island. “When I fled, Brightheart Island had been leveled by the Youngflame clan. I didn’t expect that it would have been rebuilt, and that it would be built to look exactly the way it did in the past. However...it seems as though there is no one here that I recognize.”

“I imagine that elder sister Autumn Leaf is still at the City of Ten Thousand Swords.”

Ning took a walk around Brightheart Island. He visited the place where Autumn Leaf had previously stayed, as well as the place where his father had once lived. The servants and guards didn’t see him at all.

Brightheart Island of Serpentwing Lake was Ning’s home. Coming home was truly a wonderful feeling.

“This time...no one should even think about destroying Brightheart

Island again,” Ning murmured softly. “Uncle White. It’ll be up to you.”

The Whitewater Hound behind Ning spoke out. “I’ve analyzed quite a few grand formations at Mount Innerheart, and within some of the secret tomes on formations there were also some hidden formations of supreme power. Although I haven’t thoroughly comprehended them all...simply setting them up in accordance with the instructions will prove simple. In the future, the entire Swallow Mountain region, all hundred thousand kilometers of it, will be surrounded by hundreds of layers of grand formations! Formations within formations within formations; not even Celestial Immortals will dare barge in here.”

“Good.” Ning nodded.

A powerful school or sect would definitely layer many terrifying formations around its headquarters.

In order to lay down a formation, one would first need to procure a formidable formation technique, and then go buy enough treasures to actually set it up. Thus, the formations of major schools were usually built up by successive generations of disciples of the school. The longer a school’s history, the more complicated and powerful its many layered formations would be, to the point of causing any enemy to hesitate!

Although Ning and the Whitewater Hound didn’t have that sort of long history and background, they were the disciples of Mount Innerheart!

Formation tomes generally weren’t valued that much, and so the formation tomes which Uncle White had acquired on the sixth floor of the Divinities Palace were already some of the supreme formations of the entire Three Realms. Naturally, he had learned an enormous number of formidable formations. Some he had thoroughly mastered, while others he had not, but even those he had not mastered, he could still lay them out according to the instructions.

“Uncle White,” Little Qing said, “I heard that some major schools take up hundreds of thousands of kilometers, all of which is completely covered up by formations, some of which are set down by generations of Loose Immortals and Celestial Immortals. You need to make sure that our

formations aren't weaker than theirs!"

"We are of Mount Innerheart; our formations are unfathomably more profound than the formations of those so-called major schools," Uncle White said confidently. "With enough magic treasures...I can turn the entire Swallow Mountain into an unbreakable steel dome."

"Right. When the time comes, let's pay a trip to the imperial capital and buy some formations materials. Uncle White, think about what you need and prepare a list," Ning said.

"I will. I'll come up with some of the most supreme killing formations that I've learned from those formation manuals."

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A short while later. Outside the City of Ten Thousand Swords.

The gates to the city were open. Ning led a snowy white hound inside through the city gates. The gateguards couldn't see them at all; naturally, they wouldn't bar their way.

"The changes are so significant." Ning murmured softly, "In the past, the City of Ten Thousand Swords had many ordinary mortals within it, and there were many hawkers lining the streets. Now...everything has changed. There are very few mortals here."

The many former residences of the City of Ten Thousand Swords had all been demolished, and the entire city had been completely renovated in a beautiful manner!

Within the city, there were now far more soldiers! There were also many more men and women that were dressed in absolutely beautiful clothes.

"Even I can barely recognize this place. I feel as though the City of Ten Thousand Swords has been transformed into an enormous private estate," Uncle White sighed in amazement.

Whoosh. Ning swept forward with his divine sense.

Within an estate, there were two powerful Immortal Diremonsters who were leisurely sipping wine – Immortal Duohe and Immortal Witchsui.

Their faces suddenly changed; they could sense an incomparably powerful, almost crushingly-strong divine sense sweep past them! Just from this divine sense alone...they could tell that the wielder was above ordinary Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals. It was extremely rare for Loose Immortals to have such a terrifying divine sense.

“Not good.” Immortal Duohe and Immortal Witchsui both were shocked. “An enemy!”

“Wait.”

Puzzled looks quickly appeared on their faces. The divine sense seemed rather familiar...

“Fellow Daoist Ji Ning?” They shared a glance of disbelief...but indeed, when they carefully checked again, that surge of divine sense did indeed belong to Ji Ning. However, it was even more powerful and graceful than before.

“Immortal Witchsui, Immortal Duohe, we’ll meet at Darknorth Palace in a bit,” Ning sent mentally.

“Alright,” the two Diremonster Immortals assented.

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Within a secluded courtyard in the City of Ten Thousand Swords. Autumn Leaf was taking care of her flowers. She had lived by herself for the past few decades, quietly focusing on her training. Without planning to, she actually made a breakthrough and reached the early Wanxiang level. Although Ning had previously provided her with some help, and although this was partially due to the fact that the Ji clan now had a prodigious Dao-repository, her own talent clearly was exceptional as well.

“Auntie.” A youth walked in, a look of absolute delight on his face and a look of yearning in his eyes. “Auntie, auntie, my swordplay has reached the ‘one with the world’ level.”

“Oh?” Autumn Leaf turned around, smiling as she looked at the youth. “One with the world?”

“Right right! When I was out adventuring and fighting Diremonsters, I suddenly made a breakthrough and my swordplay reached the ‘one with the world’ level,” the youth said excitedly. “Auntie, you promised me to teach me a powerful sword-art when I reached the ‘one with the world’ level.”

Autumn Leaf smiled. But suddenly...her body trembled. A look of disbelief and delight appeared in her eyes.

The youth was immediately puzzled.

“Little Rocky, hurry up and head back. Auntie has something to do,” Autumn Leaf said.

“But Auntie, you promised to teach me swordplay...” The youth was rather hesitant, unwilling to leave.

“Go back for now,” Autumn Leaf said.

“...fine.” The youth turned and left helplessly.

After the youth left, the courtyard once more became quiet. Autumn Leaf hurriedly stared at the surrounding area with agitation, searching for that familiar figure. And right at this moment, a fur-clad youth suddenly appeared out of nowhere, not too far away in front of her.

“Young master!” A look of excitement was on Autumn Leaf’s face. He looked just the same as he always had; he hadn’t changed at all. “Young master. You came back.”

“Right. I’m back.” Ning nodded slowly.

“Will you be leaving?” Autumn Leaf asked softly.

“Not this time,” Ning said.

Tears appeared in Autumn Leaf’s eyes. She nodded repeatedly. “Autumn Leaf will definitely take good care of you, young master.”

“It wouldn’t feel right if anyone else was to take care of me,” Ning said with a smile. “Let’s go and see Uncle Truekeep and the others.”

“Alright.” Autumn Leaf immediately followed him.

The City of Ten Thousand Swords. Darknorth Palace.

After the complete overhaul of the City of Ten Thousand Swords, the most important palace of the the entire Ji clan became this place, the Darknorth Palace. It was named 'Darknorth' after Ning's own Daoist title, of course! Ever since news had spread of Ning's victory in the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, the entire Ji clan had celebrated with wild abandon. This was a glory which the Ji clan had never before even imagined of in all of its history!

Ji Ning had become the absolute most glorious figure in the Ji clan's entire history!

"Uncle Truekeep, Granny Shadow, Immortal Duohe, Immortal Witchsui." Ning walked into Darknorth Palace, then called out to them.

Only four people were present within the palace. Clearly, the news of Ning's return was too shocking and sudden; none of the other formidable figures of the Ji clan had been notified yet. His return was to be kept a secret for now.

"It's good that you are back. It's good that you are back!" Granny Shadow looked at Ning, a hint of excitement and delight in her eyes.

"Where's the former patriarch and the others?" Ning couldn't help but ask.

"Because they reached the end of their lifespans...my big brother and Ah Xing have both passed on," Granny Shadow sighed. "After they left, I spent all my time by myself within the Dao-repository, waiting for my end to come as well. Who would've thought that after being within it for so long, I'd actually end up making an unexpected breakthrough?"

Ning sighed. The former patriarch, Ji Ninefire, as well as the old servant Ah Xing had both died. Of the older generation, only Granny Shadow remained.

"However, before they died, they learned of the fact that you, Ji Ning, became the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny," Granny Shadow said excitedly. "They were both excited and proud. Our Ji clan

actually produced a scion that became one of the most glorious figures of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty. This is an incomparable honor for our entire clan! Right...after you became champion, you suddenly disappeared for thirty years. Did you go follow a Celestial Immortal to study the Dao?"

The nearby Immortal Witchsui said with a laugh, "Only a truly peerless genius could become champion of the Conclave. It is quite normal for such a genius to be taken on by a Celestial Immortal; in fact, even Pure Yang True Immortals and Empyrean Gods would consider accepting such disciples."

Immortal Witchsui was of Celestial Immortal Witchriver's lineage; naturally, he knew about True Immortals and Empyrean Gods.

"I did indeed leave to go studying," Ning said with a nod.

Ning had already prepared his explanation for his thirty-plus years of disappearance. The explanation was...he had left to go studying!

Studying with who? Who was his master? That would be a secret! The more mysterious it seemed, the more caution it would inspire in careful-minded folk.

"If my gaze is correct...fellow Daoist Ji Ning, you are now a Void-level Earth Immortal," Immortal Duohe said with a laugh.

"Not just that; both of fellow Daoist Ji Ning's spirit-beasts have become Void-level Earth Immortals," the nearby Immortal Witchsui added.

"What?!" Granny Shadow, Patriarch Ji Truekeep, and Autumn Leaf all stared towards them in astonishment.

Although they were delighted by the fact that Ning had become a Void-level Earth Immortal, this was as they had expected, because they had heard long ago about Ning's Primaltwin being capable of killing Loose Immortals. Given that Ning had also gone to study the Dao with a powerful figure, what was so strange about him now having reached the Void-level and become an Earth Immortal? But the two spirit-beasts had also become Void-level Earth Immortals?!

"Right." Ning smiled and nodded, then said, "I can see that the Ji clan

has changed quite a bit.”

“Thanks to the help of Princess Xiyue, the squads which the Youngflame clan had stationed in the Ji clan’s territory left long ago.” Truekeep tamped down the curiosity he felt, then explained, “And given the additional fame and glory you won at the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, Ji Ning, who would dare antagonize our Ji clan now? We haven’t expanded; we’ve just continued to stabilize around Swallow Mountain. Over the past few decades, Swallow Mountain’s defenses have become airtight.”

Ning nodded.

“Our Ji clan hasn’t changed that much; by comparison, Stillwater Commandery has changed much more.” Truekeep let out a sigh. “The entire Stillwater Commandery is now vastly different from what it was like when you left. Even the Marquis of Stillwater has changed.”

“The Marquis of Stillwater has changed?” Ning was surprised. “To who?”

The two principal contenders for the position of Marquis of Stillwater had been Northmont Yin and Northmont Blacktiger.

“The current Marquis of Stillwater...is Northmont Yin,” Truekeep said.

Chapter 2: Ji Ning Is Back

“Northmont Yin?” Ning was startled.

“Then what of Northmont Baiwei and his father, Northmont Blacktiger?” Ning hurriedly asked, “Are they doing alright?”

Internicine struggles within ancient clans could be incredibly devastating; generally, the losers would have dire ends.

“I know about the relationship between you and Northmont Baiwei,” Ji Truekeep said, “So I kept abreast of this matter. Northmont Blacktiger and his son continue to live within Stillwater City and continue to reside within the Northmont Blacktiger Estate. Although their power is not as it was before, they aren’t at risk of dying.”

Ning finally let out a sigh of relief. Still...he was quite surprised.

Based on what he understood, the struggle within the Northmont clan of Stillwater for the position of Marquis would be extremely cruel and savage; the loser would be driven out of their estate and perhaps even expelled out from Stillwater City to some other places. In an extremely serious case, they might even be sent to a completely different minor world with the assignment of subjugating it for the clan. There, they might live out the end of their days. Unexpectedly, after Northmont Yin had become the Marquis, his most powerful foe, Northmont Blacktiger, was still able to reside in Stillwater City.

After the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning finished asking his questions and felt a bit more relaxed. He then said, “I’m going to make a trip; I should be back in ten days or half a month or so.”

“Ji Ning,” Granny Shadow said in her gravelly voice, “The outside world is very chaotic right now. You must be careful.”

“Chaotic?” Ning was puzzled. “Why is it chaotic?”

Truekeep explained, “Our Ji clan is permanently stationed here at Swallow Mountain, and so we don’t know too much about the chaos in the outside world. What we do know, however, is that in the past twenty

to thirty years, many tribes and clans within Stillwater Commandery have been wiped out! The entire Stillwater Commandery is in a state of enormous upheaval right now. Of course, the annihilated clans and tribes were all fairly weak tribes that had no Immortals...but there were still a number of annihilated clans that were comparable to Snowdragon Mountain back in its heyday.”

“What?!” Ning felt as though something was off. In Stillwater Commandery, powers comparable to Snowdragon Mountain were already fairly strong.

Powers with Immortals guarding them, by contrast, would be considered truly first-rate.

Above them would be the eight supreme powers; the Black-White College, the Skysplitter Sword Sect, the Hundred Flowers Fairyland, the Heavenly Saint Church, the Blood God Church, the Dragonhunter clan, the Eastriver clan, and the Bluewood clan.

The most supreme powers, of course, were the Northmont clan as well as the local Raindragon Guard.

“Powers comparable to Snowdragon Mountain...they all have extremely deep and stable roots; it’s rare for one of them to be wiped out, even in a thousand years. How is it that a number of them have been wiped out in twenty to thirty short years?” Ning said.

“The Ji clan stays here at Swallow Mountain. We’re not too sure,” Truekeep said.

Ning frowned.

When Ning had left Mount Innerheart, his master had warned him of the dangerous undercurrents within the Three Realms, claiming that even he himself might fall. Now, upon returning to Stillwater Commandery, he discovered that local regions were already beginning to turn chaotic...

“A great secret most likely lies behind the chaos in Stillwater Commandery,” Ning mused silently to himself. “It seems I need to be even more careful than I anticipated. If even Master must be extremely

careful...this little bit of power I have is nothing.”

“Granny Shadow. Uncle Truekeep.” Ning immediately said, “Given the state of chaos Stillwater Commandery is in, your actions are correct. It is best for our Ji clan to peacefully remain here at Swallow Mountain. Mm... I’m going to make a trip. I’ll be back in ten days or so. Autumn Leaf, no need to follow me; wait here for my return.”

“Alright.” Autumn Leaf nodded.

“Immortal Duohe, Immortal Witchsui...the safety of my Ji clan will depend on your efforts,” Ning said.

“We are only acting as is proper. Fellow Daoist Ji Ning, you rescued all of us from the Immortal estate; it is right and proper for us to help out,” Immortal Witchsui said hurriedly.

“The monsters of the Immortal estate are living here at Swallow Mountain as well. We shall prosper together or perish together with the Ji clan.” Immortal Duohe spoke out warmly as well. In the past, for the sake of their clan, they had sworn a thousand year oath...but now that Ning had come back as a Void-level Earth Immortal, as had his two spirit-beasts, their attitudes had changed significantly.

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In the air a few thousand kilometers outside of Stillwater City. A spatial ripple appeared, then a fur-clad youth walked out, a snowy white hound by his side.

Around Ning’s arm was a little azure snake. The snake raised its little head, staring into the distance, then said excitedly, “We’re finally at Stillwater City. Hahaha, I, Little Qing, have become a Void-level Earth Immortal. I’d be considered an expert even here in Stillwater City now!”

Swoosh!

Ning rode the wind as he flew towards Stillwater City.

“I’m back. I wonder if Master is at the Black-White College.” Ning quickly saw the distant Black-White College; when Ning had left,

Immortal Diancai had gone out adventuring to temper himself. Nearly forty years had passed since then; Ning wondered if he was back yet.

Whoosh. Ning flew directly into the Black-White College.

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Within the marquisate of Stillwater. There were many crystal globes hovering in midair, each being watched over by an Immortal cultivator.

“Someone flew directly into Stillwater city!” A cultivator quickly noticed the scene that just appeared within one of the watched crystal balls. He immediately reported this aloud, and soon had his report verified by someone else.

“A fur-clad youth, an Azure Skysnake, a Whitewater Hound.”

“This person should be the person who became the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny more than thirty years ago, then disappeared without a trace – Adept Darknorth, Ji Ning!”

“Intelligence reports regarding Adept Darknorth are classified as top-priority. Quick, go report this!”

Soon, this intelligence report was transferred to higher-ups.

The Northmont clan of Stillwater kept an extremely tight watch over its enfeoffed territory. In Stillwater City at least, anyone who dared to fly about in the open had to be clearly investigated. In fact... whenever there was an especially powerful ripple of elemental energy anywhere in the entire vast commandery of Stillwater, it would be discovered and investigated!

For example, when Immortal Firedragon made his breakthrough in Swallow Mountain, the Northmont clan of Stillwater immediately discovered it.

“Ji Ning?”

“The Ji Ning that disappeared more than thirty years ago after the Conclave of Immortal Destiny?”

“This information needs to be reported to the Patriarch right away!”

“Right.”

The news continued to climb through the ranks. And soon...the news made its way to Celestial Immortal Hunchmont.

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A hunchbacked old man with white hair who held a gnarled wooden staff took a single step forward and appeared in midair, then flew towards the direction of the Black-White College.

“I heard that Sword Immortal Evergreen of the Crimsonbright League had intended to take Ji Ning as his disciple...but it seemed as though Ji Ning didn’t take him on as his master, nor did he apprentice himself to any of the other Immortals or Empyrean Gods affiliated with Daofather Crimsonbright. In fact...the Immortals of the Crimsonbright League have no idea where Ji Ning is at all.” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont quietly pondered over this.

Ning’s disappearance had briefly caused a stir. It must be understood that even Pure Yang True Immortals like Lu Dongbin had been interested in taking Ning as a disciple...and in fact, Lu Dongbin had been extremely eager to do so. However, the Grand Xia Emperor had resolutely refused to agree, insisting on keeping Ning for the Crimsonbright League.

But in the end...?

Almost everyone who had been in the Skylight Palace for the Conclave had been a Celestial Immortal. The news of this matter had quickly spread. All of those Celestial Immortals were under Daofather Crimsonbright’s command, and so they were all investigating this matter. They all had learned that Sword Immortal Evergreen had sought to take Ning as a disciple, but Ning had refused and disappeared.

However...no matter how they searched, none of the Immortals under Daofather Crimsonbright’s command could find out who had taken Ning on as a disciple. Everyone guessed that Ning had most likely ended up not joining Daofather Crimsonbright’s side.

So where had Ji Ning gone to?

Why didn't he take Sword Immortal Evergreen as his master?

Who had he taken as his master? Or did he even have a master at all? Was he wandering alone?!

This became a mystery!

"You all seem to be having a happy chat." The staff-holding Celestial Immortal Hunchmont arrived before the Headmaster's Hall in the Black-White College. He strode inside, sweeping the people within with his long-browed, deep gaze. There were more than ten Immortals gathered here. Thirty years ago, the Black-White College didn't have this many Immortals. During the past period of time, however, Stillwater Commandery had simply become too chaotic, and so the Primal Daoists with very deep levels of enlightenment such as Daoist Jadesea, who had previously been taking their time, all decided to make their breakthroughs. They had all reached the Void-level and become Earth Immortals.

"Senior Hunchmont."

Instantly, all the Immortals of the Black-White College saluted respectfully. Ning saluted as well. "Senior Hunchmont."

"Ji Ning returned?" Celestial Immortal Hunchmont nodded lightly, his eyes lighting up. "It's only been thirty years, but both you and your spirit-beasts have reached the Void-level as Earth Immortals. Monsters train much more slowly than we humans do, but your two spirit-beasts have both reached the Void-level...it seems the past thirty-plus years represented a huge stroke of fortune for you."

The short elder nearby, Immortal Fivecraze, let out an emotional sigh. "We were just discussing this as well. Becoming a Void-level Earth Immortal is no easy task. Ning and both his spirit-beasts...well, our Black-White College now has three more Earth Immortals. Naturally, all of us are extremely happy."

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont nodded, then said, "Young friend Ji Ning, you disappeared all those years ago, drawing quite a bit of attention. Where did you go for the past period of time?"

Ning smiled. "I went to take on a master and to study."

"Take on a master?" Celestial Immortal Hunchmont was intrigued. He hurriedly asked, "Might I ask who?"

"Forgive me for not being able to tell you," Ning said.

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont laughed. "I won't force it, I won't force it." But in his heart, he secretly mumbled to himself, "It seems one of the powers of the Three Realms must've run off with him, which is why he isn't willing to say his master's name; I imagine he doesn't want to cause trouble. However...for his master to be so daring means that he is most likely a formidable figure."

The question of who Ning had taken on his master was indeed quite an intriguing one. This was because any power who took on Ning as a disciple would have at least somewhat offended Daofather Crimsonbright's side!

Still...the Crimsonbright League wouldn't hold anything against Ning personally. This was because if one was to take on a disciple, the disciple had to be willing! True Immortals, Empyrean Gods, Daofathers...anyone taking on a disciple had to ask if the disciple was willing to accept him as a master! If Ning was unwilling, nobody could force him. For Ning to willingly run off with someone else and take him or her as his master only meant that the Grand Xia Emperor would have to suffer this loss in silence.

"If you are free, young friend Ji Ning, you can pay a visit to the marquissate of Stillwater," Celestial Immortal Hunchmont said with a chortle.

"Definitely," Ning said.

"Right. I won't interrupt your reunion with your comrades any longer." Celestial Immortal Hunchmont immediately turned, still-leaning on his gnarled staff, and gracefully departed.

Within the hall.

"Ji Ning, Stillwater Commandery is a bit chaotic right now. You need to

be careful. Although our Black-White College stands on the side of the Northmont clan of Stillwater...we can't just stupidly offer ourselves up and die for them for no reason," Immortal Fivecraze said in a low voice. All the other Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals present all nodded and looked towards Ning.

Ji Ning and the Sloppy Daoist were the two mighty future pillars of their Black-White College! They didn't wish for Ning to be taken advantage of.

Ning nodded. "I understand. Right...has my master returned to the Black-White College?"

"Your master came back just a few days ago. He's in closed-door meditation right now; most likely, he is going to attempt his Celestial Tribulation soon," Immortal Fivecraze said.

"Tribulation?" Ning was surprised.

Chapter 3: Blood God Church

Soon, Ji Ning met with Immortal Diancai.

Within a quiet, secluded courtyard. There was a gourd of Immortal wine, two wine cups, a master, and a disciple. The two were drinking wine and chatting with each other.

“Master, I didn’t disturb your meditations, did I?” Ning asked.

“I was just engaging in ordinary meditation; I wasn’t in a prajna-state of sudden enlightenment. What’s there to disturb?” Immortal Diancai looked at Ning, then nodded with satisfaction. “Ji Ning, you are far more powerful than you were in the past. When you first entered my tutelage, you were a piece of unpolished jade; you were quite young. But now, your divine sense is a bit more powerful than even mine; you truly are the peerless genius who became the champion of the Conclave after having trained for merely thirty or so years.”

“If you keep praising me this much, Master, I’m going to start wiggling with delight,” Ning joked with a laugh.

“You little punk...” Immortal Diancai laughed, then shook his head.

Ning said seriously, “Master, are you truly planning to take on your Celestial Tribulation soon? This is something that you need to be extremely cautious about; you can’t be the slightest bit over-confident in handling it.”

“I know that. Of course I know that. There are countless Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals, but it’s rare for the entire Grand Xia world to produce a single Celestial Immortal in a million years.” Immortal Diancai continued, “But times are changing. In the past twenty, thirty years, there were multiple Earth Immortals who successfully overcame their Celestial Tribulation and became Celestial Immortals in the Grand Xia world.”

“Multiple?!” Ning was surprised.

“Right.” Immortal Diancai nodded. “The greater a storm, the more

experts are born from within! And during my previous period of training, my subconscious was telling me...that a great storm is coming. If I want to overcome my tribulation and become a Celestial Immortal, I have to do so before this storm comes. Only then will I have a chance. If I delay...I'll probably die within it."

Ning was secretly shocked.

An Immortal's subconscious senses were usually very accurate. In truth, ever since he had returned to the Grand Xia world, Ning himself had subconsciously felt as though a terrifying tempest was about to erupt. However...he didn't sense that he needed to make his breakthrough before it. Clearly, with his success in training the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], Ning's chances of survival were much greater than Immortal Diancai's.

"Master." Ning suddenly waved his hand, and a man-high pile of books suddenly appeared.

"What's this?" Immortal Diancai said, puzzled.

"A Dao-Repository," Ning said. "You can look at these three books, Master."

Ning pulled out three thick tomes from the pile.

Immortal Diancai immediately accepted the three books, then began to flip through them. These had been acquired by Ning in the Crescent world after killing the monster kings and the evil Patriarch! It must be understood that these powerful figures were generally extremely self-confident; in order to prevent other powers from destroying their Dao-Repositories, they would generally carry a copy with them at all times. When the Flamewing King had destroyed the Qi Empire, he had acquired a portion of the Qi Empire's Dao-Repository, which Ning now naturally had as well.

"A fine sword-art. A fine sword-art!" Immortal Diancai's eyes were shining as he flipped through a second book. He said excitedly, "This directly guides one through the Grand Dao!"

Ning laughed.

It must be understood that the Qi Empire needed only a few tens of thousands of years to establish an Empire that spanned a million kilometers. How incredible had its Dao-Repository been? The Twelve Monster Kings of the Eastern Flows and the evil Patriarch were all comparable to Celestial Immortals; the Dao-Repositories they had built up were similarly astonishing. Although there was no way they could come close to comparing to Mount Innerheart's, their repositories were ten times superior to the Black-White College's!

"Ji Ning, these Dao-Repositories...?" Immortal Diancai looked towards Ning.

"Don't worry, Master. Your disciple acquired them with his own power; they don't come with any strings attached. I prepared them for you, Master, and for the Black-White College," Ning said. Because of the rules of the Old Patriarch, the supreme arts of Mount Innerheart were absolutely not to be taught to any outsiders. There were no such restrictions, however, on the techniques Ning had acquired from the monster kings and the evil Patriarch.

The Black-White College had ten-plus Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals, all of which were extraordinary. With these Dao-Repositories, their level of power would rise once again.

As for the Ji clan?

Ning had used an ink technique to duplicate copies for the Ji clan. In addition...Ning believed that as he grew increasingly powerful, the Dao-Repositories he would acquire would also become increasingly formidable. For the dreams of his father, for the dreams of the deceased Patriarch Ninefire and the others, and for the sake of himself as a descendant of the Ji clan, he would naturally do everything he could to make the Ji clan flourish.

"Good, good, good. These Dao-Repositories are all quite incredible." Immortal Diancai was truly excited. "The three sword-arts manuals you picked out are all of great help to me and have given me insight. I need to immediately go into closed-door meditation and ponder on them. My

chances of overcoming the tribulation are now a bit greater.”

Ning nodded.

These three sword-arts manuals were all comparable to the complete [Three-Foot Sword]; they were truly superb tomes on the Dao of the Sword! In the current Black-White College, there were only two Sword Immortals at the Void level; Ji Ning and Immortal Diancai. No one would fight with Immortal Diancai over these tomes.

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“Wonderful.”

All of the Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals of the Black-White College were now gathered at Immortal Diancai’s place. Upon seeing the piles of Dao-Repositories, they were instantly all overjoyed.

“Divine ability, [Nine Melodies of Virtue].”

“Divine ability, [Bloodshadow Evasion].”

“Secret art, [Thousandstar Soulscur].”

“A Pure Yang-level Ki Refining Technique. Our Black-White College has no Pure Yang-level Ki Refining Techniques!”

“This one is a Pure Yang-level Ki Refining Technique as well.”

“A formation here.”

“Is this a technique for creating constructs?”

All sorts of tomes on the Dao were present. The Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals could feel the blood boiling in their veins as they read.

Ning just quietly sighed to himself. At Mount Innerheart, there were quite a few Ki Refining Techniques that were at the Daofather level! There were many sword-arts created by Daofathers, but unfortunately Mount Innerheart techniques could not be taught to others. Thus, he could only give the repositories of the monster kings and the vile Patriarch to his school...and yet, this was already enough to make them go wild with joy.

The Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals of the Black-White College were all extraordinary figures.

In the past, they didn't have a truly top-tier Dao-Repository. Now that Ning had given them one, it was guaranteed that all of them would once more increase in power. Even Immortal Fivecraze was laughing loudly right now. "With this Dao-Repository, the fortunes of our Black-White College have improved tenfold! Back during the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, when little Sloppy entered the top six and Ji Ning became champion, I knew that our Black-White College was in for an era of tremendous luck...and today, I've finally seen the fruits of that luck. With this Dao-Repository, haha...even I myself can live for at least another ten thousand years."

Immortal Fivecraze had expected that after roughly nine centuries or so, he would no longer be able to withstand the next trial from the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations, but with these new Dao-Repositories, his insights would deepen and his strength would grow; naturally, he would now be able to live longer.

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Night.

Ji Ning and Immortal Diancai were walking within a path inside the Black-White College.

"Ji Ning, a Dao-Repository is a school's foundation. With these new ones, the Black-White College will grow more powerful, and will become comparable to some of the supreme schools of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty." Immortal Diancai looked at Ning. "This is all because of you. The contribution you have made this time is too, too great."

Some disciples preferred to give powerful Dao-Repositories to their own tribes instead. It was very rare for them to give so much to their school.

"It really was nothing." Ning shook his head.

"Currently, it isn't just Stillwater Commandery that is in a state of chaos; there are dangerous undercurrents within the entire Grand Xia

world, causing all sorts of trouble. With these Dao-Repositories, the supreme Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals of our Black-White College will rise to a new level of power. As a result, more members of the Black-White College will be able to survive this storm.” Immortal Diancai looked at Ning. “The arrival of a Dao-Repository at such a critical moment is worth more than ten Dao-Repositories that come after the storm passes.”

Ning was puzzled. “Master, how exactly is our Stillwater Commandery in a state of chaos?”

“You don’t know?” Immortal Diancai didn’t understand.

“I just returned to the Grand Xia, and I didn’t have a chance to chat too much with old brother Fivecraze before you left your meditations, Master,” Ning said.

Immortal Diancai nodded. “Then I’ll give you a rough idea. Stillwater Commandery...right, roughly ten years ago, that friend of yours named Northmont Baiwei suffered an assassination attempt and nearly died. The assassination attempt was here in Stillwater City!”

“What?!” Ning was shocked. “Within Stillwater City? But...but this is a direct challenge to the Grand Xia Dynasty!”

Violence was forbidden within the commandery cities of the Grand Xia. This was the law! When the likes of the Youngflame clan sent out the likes of Immortal Floatcloud, they were sending out Deathsworn who were willing to die!

“How is Northmont Baiwei doing now?” Ning asked.

“He was lucky enough to survive, and so he’s naturally doing fine,” Immortal Diancai said. “During the past twenty, thirty years...there have been more than a hundred assassination’s within Stillwater Commandery. Although we all suspect that it was the Blood God Church behind them, that’s just our suspicion; we have no proof. Without proof, it isn’t appropriate for the Grand Xia Dynasty to intervene.”

Ning said, puzzled, “The Blood God Church...one of the eight great

powers of Stillwater Commandery? They have this sort of audacity?"

More than a hundred assassinations within Stillwater City...this was too crazy.

"Why wouldn't they? They have more audacity than you can imagine." Immortal Diancai shook his head. "The Blood God Church has always been an association of madmen...and in recent days, they have exploded forth with astonishing power. They butted heads with the Northmont clan multiple times recently, and it was actually the Northmont clan that was at a disadvantage each time."

"What?!" Ning could hardly believe it. The Northmont clan of Stillwater held the marquisate for this entire region! The Blood God Church was merely one of the eight strongest powers here. Logically speaking, if the Northmont clan wanted to deal with the Blood God Church, it wouldn't be too hard for them to completely wipe it out.

"The Blood God Church's power is far greater than it appeared in the past," Immortal Diancai said. "The leader of the Blood God Church battled against Celestial Immortal Hunchmont...and even Celestial Immortal Hunchmont was unable to do anything to him. Quite a few bases and cultivator armies of the Northmont clan have been forcibly wiped out and uprooted by the Blood God Church. In battles at the Loose Immortal level or at lower levels, the Northmont clan has never been able to seize the upper hand. All that can be said is that both sides are fighting a tight battle against each other."

Ning could scarcely believe what he was hearing. An exalted marquisate was actually unable to wipe out just one of eight major powers within its demesnes?

"The leader of the Blood God Church wasn't this powerful in the past." Immortal Diancai shook his head. "I even fought with him, the 'Son of the Blood God', in the past. In such a short period of time...he's actually raised his power to the Celestial Immortal level."

Ning nodded.

"The Northmont clan of Stillwater is feeling some pain now. They want

to pull in the other powers to deal with the Blood God Church together,” Immortal Diancai said. “But not just our own Stillwater Commandery is in a state of chaos; the entire Grand Xia Dynasty is in a state of chaos. How could the various tribes and schools dare act rashly?”

“How could things have ended up this way?” Ning frowned.

The entire Grand Xia was in a state of chaos; it seemed as though the previous order had already been torn apart. It was as though there was an incomparably terrifying invisible hand moving behind the scenes, guiding everything.

“The storm sweeping the entire Grand Xia world, the sudden increase in power of the Blood God School...these things have caused us to guess that there should be a tremendous secret behind the rise of the Blood God School. Ji Ning, you must not be a fool and charge blindly forward into it. This is something for the Northmont clan to worry about,” Immortal Diancai instructed. “During a storm, during a tribulation...you need to be extremely careful.”

“Right.” Ning nodded. “Master, go rest for now. I’m going to go meet with my fellow disciples.”

“Your fellow disciples? Do you know where your junior apprentice-brother, Mu Northson, has gone?” Immortal Diancai asked.

“No idea. We haven’t met for thirty-plus years; I was planning to go see him.” Puzzled, Ning asked, “What, where is he?”

Immortal Diancai shook his head. “More than twenty years ago, Mu Northson and his Dao-companion both disappeared!”

Chapter 4: Those Retainers From Back Then

“Missing?” Ji Ning’s heart trembled. He hurriedly asked, “Since when did he get a Dao-companion? Who is his Dao-companion? And this ‘disappearing’ that happened twenty-plus years ago; are there no clues about it at all? Can’t we ask the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to help out?”

Upon seeing now nervous Ning was, Immortal Diancai immediately explained, “After you became the champion of the Conclave, some of the disciples of the Black-White College that were outside returned here. Mu Northson returned to Stillwater City as well, spending most of his time training in his art of constructs. Occasionally, he would gather with Northmont Baiwei as well as some of the other members of the younger generation here in Stillwater City. During one of these gatherings, he met with a female disciple of the Thousand Rivers School, ‘Adept Yuxia’. Soon after they met, they grew to be quite close and ended up becoming Dao-companions.”

“These two Dao-companions had very deep feelings for each other, and quite a few members of the younger generation here in Stillwater City envied them. They were a celebrated couple.”

“But after a period of time, both he and his Dao-companion vanished. Generally speaking, when disciples of the Black-White College go out adventuring, they will inform people within the College, or leave behind a message of some sort. But neither Mu Northson nor Adept Yuxia left any messages; they just vanished.”

“The Black-White College looked into this matter; we even asked the Northmont clan of Stillwater to help out, as well as the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. However, we were still unable to find any traces of them.”

“They seemed to have completely vanished from this world!”

Hearing his master's words, Ning grew even more panicked. He said hurriedly, "Can it be that there have been traces of them in the past twenty-plus years?"

"None." Immortal Diancai shook his head.

Ning was really worried now. It didn't add up. This made no sense at all. Northson wasn't the unreliable sort. Northson was a true lifelong friend for Ning, and friends with others besides! If he truly did have to leave because of an important reason, he would've left a message for Ning at least.

"During the past twenty-plus years, even the number one intelligence organization in the world, the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, wasn't able to find any trace of him at all," Immortal Diancai said. "Northson's parents died long ago; he had no other kin. Adept Yuxia, however, did have a tribe behind her, with both parents and elders; both of her parents are alive, but they don't have any news of her either."

"However...don't panic," Immortal Diancai said.

"His life-tablet?" Ning immediately asked. Given how long Northson had been missing for, he was very possibly dead.

"Mu Northson's life-tablet remains intact...but his Dao-companion's has shattered," Immortal Diancai said. "Neither of them left behind any messages before disappearing; they should've both met an unusual circumstance. However...Northson has remained alive during the past twenty-plus years. He probably won't die that easily."

Ning was worried now.

Northson's Dao-companion had perished! This meant that their disappearance involved a matter of great danger!

"Since he's alive, my best guess is that he is trapped in a special area that he can't leave for now," Immortal Diancai said.

"Right." Ning nodded.

No matter what, he had to find out a way to investigate.

“Go and rest for now. I’m going back into my closed-door meditation,” Immortal Diancai said. “The three sword-arts manuals you gave me have inspired me significantly; if there’s nothing important, don’t bother me. I’m going to be in seclusion for an extended period of time. Most likely, once this seclusion ends, I will begin my Celestial Tribulation.”

“That fast?” Ning hadn’t expected his master to be in such a rush even after he had given his master those three sword-arts tomes.

“I believe these three sword-arts tomes will be enough to allow my sword techniques to rise to a higher level in a short period of time. However...the reason I can rise to a higher level in such a short time is because of all of my accumulated experiences over the past years! If I want to rise any further, however, I’ll probably need another century, or perhaps even longer...and I have the feeling that I can’t wait that long!” Immortal Diancai said softly, “That sense of pressure and threat which my subconscious can sense...it is telling me that I cannot afford to waste any time.”

Ning nodded solemnly.

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After separating from his master, Ning returned to the Darknorth Peak, the place within the Black-White College which was reserved for him.

A sumptuous feast had been prepared within a courtyard inside Darknorth Peak.

While Ning had been chatting with Immortal Diancai, he had instructed the Whitewater Hound and Little Qing to go back to Darknorth Peak.

“Senior apprentice-brother.” Three figures within the hall bowed reverently. A short little figure fell to his knees. “I pay my respects to you, elder.”

Ning swept them with his gaze.

One of the three was Meng Roch, who looked as honest as always but now seemed even more muscular than before. Next to him was a tall,

skinny youth with a deep gaze; this was Cloudship, who was now far calmer and more stable than he had been before. Finally, there was a woman dressed in black gauze, whose gaze remained as charismatic and alluring as before; Cloudjade, who had been so young and fresh. She was holding the hand of a child in her own.

“Eh?” Ning’s gaze fell upon the child.

“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, this is my child, Cloudease,” Cloudjade said nervously.

“We haven’t met for a few decades...to think you have a child now!” Ning laughed, then nodded. “Meng Roch, it seems you are quite talented as a Fiendgod Body Refiner; you’ve already trained to the Wanxiang level. Cloudship, you have done well too.”

As he spoke, Ning sat down. “Come, all of you, sit,” Ning said with a laugh. Immediately, all the others sat down as well.

“Years ago, when we heard that you became the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, and that your Primaltwin had killed a Loose Immortal, all of us were filled with veneration and admiration. Now, we’ve finally met you again, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning,” Cloudship laughed.

Ning nodded calmly. “Right. Have you been well, these past years? Weifang, Forgard, Nethersun; where are they?”

He had taken on a total of six retainers. They were Meng Roch, Cloudship, Cloudjade, Weifang, Forgard, and Nethersun.

“Should I...or should...” Cloudship looked towards Roch and Cloudjade.

“Big brother, why don’t you tell him,” Cloudjade said. Roch nodded as well.

Cloudship looked towards Ning, then said, “Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, you have left Darknorth Peak for nearly forty years. Ever since you left, the six of us trained diligently. Meng Roch is extremely talented as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, and so focused on that, rarely leaving the College. Nethersun, Forgard, Weifang, and myself would often go out and

adventure.”

“Forgard was originally very powerful, but his potential was limited, and he improved very slowly. Roughly ten years ago, when adventuring, he was killed by another peak Zifu Disciple,” Cloudship said.

Ning immediately sighed.

Forgard...

He had been a loyal guard of Northmont Baiwei. He had appeared quite simple and honest, and Ning originally had high expectations for him. However...after getting to know him, Ning had realized that Forgard had slowly begun to change after entering the Black-White College, causing Ning to feel rather disappointed. And now, unexpectedly, he had ended up dying.

“Weifang was extremely talented, even more so than the rest of us,” Cloudship said. “However...he became Dao-companions with a female cultivator of the Hundred Flowers Fairyland. There ended up being some disputes between him and that female cultivator, and in the end, a senior apprentice-brother of that female cultivator actually killed him.”

“What?!” Ning was shocked.

He had heard long ago that some Dao-companions would grow to hate each other, betray each other, and even fight against each other. But he really didn’t expect that this would happen to one of his six retainers!

“Nethersun?” Ning asked. “Is he dead too?”

“Nethersun left long ago. He went back to his homeland. Based on what he said to us when he left, he probably won’t come back in the future. He will probably stay back at his homeland and protect it,” Cloudship said.

Ning nodded gently.

“Cloudjade became Dao-companions with a young master of the Eastriver clan, Eastriver Bluecloud,” Cloudship said, and as he did, he instantly grew so angry he began to grind his teeth. “Eastriver Bluecloud was a rare genius, and he even became a member of our Black-White

College. Because he also likes to train in the sword, others often flattered him as the 'second Immortal Darknorth'. However, compared to you, senior apprentice-brother, he is unfathomably inferior."

Ning drank his wine, listening.

"Both I and my little sister misjudged him. He came from a large clan, after all, and was quite young; after he entered the Black-White College, especially after he started hanging around with some of the other young masters of Stillwater City, he changed. He began to buy quite a few female slaves to play with, and he even started to hit and curse at my little sister. Enraged, she separated from him, then brought little Cloudease back to Darknorth Peak. Eastriver Bluecloud even wanted to cause her some trouble, but thanks to your reputation, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, he didn't dare to act too rashly," Cloudship said.

Cloudjade sat there, eyes red. She said softly, "I've embarrassed myself before you, senior apprentice-brother."

Ning sighed.

Cloudjade truly was an extremely alluring beauty. When she had first entered the Black-White College, Ning's own subordinates including Weifang, Nethersun, and Forgard had all pursued and courted her. There were quite a few ordinary disciples within the Black-White College who had courted her, but she had her sights set higher and had taken an interest in none of them.

Who would've thought that in the end, she would end up choosing a talented young master of the Eastriver clan, Eastriver Bluecloud, a formal disciple of the Black-White College?

Unfortunately...

In the end...this had been her aftermath.

"Brother Meng Roch has become the most formidable of us," Cloudship said. "Brother Meng Roch is extremely talented as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, and in fact Immortal Fivecraze took a liking to him and took him on as a disciple, making him a formal disciple of the Black-White

College. He has his own mountain peak now, but he's always continued to live here, not moving away."

"Oh?" Ning looked towards Roch with surprise, then laughed. "You've become a formal disciple? Old brother Fivecraze has exceptionally astute judgment; since he's taken a liking to you, it must mean that your future truly is limitless."

"If it hadn't been for you, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, helping me enter the Black-White College so many years ago...I don't know where I would be right now," Roch said honestly.

Ning nodded. Roch didn't show the slightest bit of arrogance; it seemed as though of his six retainers, Roch was the only one who was particularly impressive.

"That's the other five. As for me..." Cloudship chortled. "Only after training for many years did I discover that I actually like the art of constructs."

Ning let out a sigh.

Six retainers.

Two died. One returned home. Cloudship was low-key, while the devilishly alluring Cloudjade was now a single mother. Only Roch, who had originally been the weakest of the six, had suddenly soared in status, becoming a formal disciple of the Black-White College.

Ji Ning had returned to the Black-White College. When he was strolling outside with Immortal Diancai, many disciples of the Black-White College saw him. News of this quickly spread, and the Heavenly Treasures Mountain naturally learned of this as well.

"The champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, Ji Ning, has once more returned to the Black-White College after a thirty-year disappearance."

"Quick."

"Spread the word."

More than a thousand Immortal cultivators were sending out intelligence reports.

There were many, many people who were paying attention to Ji Ning in the Grand Xia world. Aside from the likes of Ninelotus, Princess Xiyue, and the Youngflame clan, there were also many hidden powers that had long ago turned their attention to Ji Ning, the champion of the Conclave who had so mysteriously vanished! After all...everyone knew how extraordinary that Conclave had been.

That was a Conclave where two participants had been chosen by Daofathers to become personal disciples! Ji Ning had been the champion of that Conclave, but he hadn't become a member of Daofather Crimsonbright's league; instead, he had vanished without a trace.

Chapter 5: The Number One Assassin's Guild of the Grand Xia

At the very peak of a grand mountain, there lay an ancient tower.

A gray-robed figure was advancing towards the tower at high speed, like a streak of light.

The entrance to the tower was guarded by a pair of black-armored guards. These two guards stretched out their arms, barring the entrance. One of them growled, "This is a restricted area. No access permitted."

"I've come per the orders of the clan leader. I have important news to report to the Patriarch." The gray-robed man respectfully handed forward a hidebound scroll.

"Mm." One of the guards accepted the scroll, then entered the tower. As for the gray-robed man, he respectfully, quietly departed.

The first floor of the tower. A tall, skinny elder with long, narrow eyes was seated silently in the lotus position; it was Celestial Immortal Arcanum of the Youngflame clan.

"Patriarch." The black-armored warrior entered, saluted respectfully, then offered the scroll with both hands.

Patriarch Arcanum opened his eyes. Waving his hand, he caused the hidebound scroll to fly to him, then calmly instructed, "Leave me."

"Yes." The black-armored guard hurriedly departed, once more taking up silent guard outside the entrance to the tower. He had been standing outside this tower for more than a hundred million years now; ever since he had been created, he had spent the majority of his life guarding this tower.

Whoosh. Patriarch Arcanum unfurled the scroll, calmly looking at its contents.

"Mm?" Patriarch Arcanum frowned. "That brat, Ji Ning, has returned? And not just him; even his spirit-beasts have returned, and both have

actually reached the early Void level.”

No one doubted that Ning had the ability to reach the Void level. After all, even before the Conclave had begun, Ning’s Primaltwin, at the peak Primal Daoist level, had been able to kill a Loose Immortal. It was very normal for Ning to become an Earth Immortal after thirty years. But for both his spirit-beasts to reach the Void level and become Earth Immortals...this was very abnormal.

This was because humans had a much higher level of comprehension than monsters. For the two spirit-beasts to both become Void-level Earth Immortals clearly meant that they had already surpassed the level of comprehension necessary of Earth Immortals! Even though Whitewater Hounds and Azure Skysnakes were Godbeasts, logically speaking, they shouldn’t be able to train at such a pace! Monsters were innately slow at training. For them to train so quickly...they must have encountered some sort of unique fortune!

“It seems that during his thirty-year disappearance, this Ji Ning must have had a stroke of luck.” Cold light flashed through Patriarch Arcanum’s long, narrow eyes.

“Everyone.” Patriarch Arcanum suddenly called out, his voice passing through the void and entering another space.

“Everyone!”

“Everyone!”

“Everyone!”

His voice echoed within this other space.

Whoosh!

A black fog door appeared not too far away from Patriarch Arcanum. Four figures emerged from the black fog door. There was a handsome youth, an ancient elder, a big fellow who carried a large clock with one hand, and a wizened, white-haired elder whose eyes were shut.

The four walked over, then sat down in the lotus position.

“Arcanum, why have you called for us?” The handsome youth asked calmly.

“What important matter has occurred, for you to call the four of us over?” The man holding the golden clock said in a low voice.

The other two were silent.

All of them were Celestial Immortal Patriarchs; they were the true pillars of the Youngflame clan! Because of the dangerous undercurrents currently flowing within the world of the Grand Xia, even Celestial Immortals like them were being very cautious. All five of them, Patriarch Arcanum included, were stationed here and guarding this divine tower.

“Everyone, take a look.” Patriarch Arcanum waved his hand, and the hidebound scroll flew out to levitate in midair.

The four Celestial Immortals all took a look, and the wizened elder with closed eyes swept it within his coresense as well.

“Ji Ning?”

“That Ji Ning is back?”

All of them frowned.

Naturally, they all knew Ji Ning’s name. During the previous Conclave of Immortal Destiny, they weren’t yet aware of how special it was, but after its conclusion...the Grand Xia world began to be filled with dangerous undercurrents. In fact, a storm was about to burst upon the entire Three Realms...and so they understood that a great tribulation was about to come to pass.

As they saw it, an enormous storm like this might be easily overcome by True Gods or Daofathers, but things would be dangerous for Celestial Immortals like them. During every single previous storm, large numbers of Celestial Immortals had perished.

“The Three Realms are in a turbulent state. That previous Conclave will most likely have given birth to future major powers of the Three Realms. Two competitors in that Conclave became disciples of Daofathers!”

Patriarch Arcanum growled, "And this Ji Ning; he became the champion of that Conclave. He disappeared in a mysterious fashion for thirty years, but didn't become apprenticed to any of the Immortals or Fiends of the Crimsonbright League. And now, even his two spirit-beasts have both become Void-level Earth Immortals! Without question...during the past thirty years, this Ji Ning has had a tremendous stroke of luck!"

"Mm."

"Agreed."

"He probably became apprenticed to one of the major forces of the Three Realms."

The other four Patriarchs all nodded in agreement.

"He is a survivor of the Yuchi clan. Our Youngflame clan wiped out their entire lineage. His mother was named Yuchi Snow; all of Yuchi Snow's kinsmen died in the hands of our Youngflame clansmen. This Ji Ning hates our Youngflame clan, without question," Patriarch Arcanum said. "What's more, our Youngflame clan even sent a Loose Immortal Deathsworn to assassinate him. It is most likely going to be very hard to resolve this enmity between us!"

"I had originally thought that he would become apprenticed to a True Immortal or Empyrean God under the command of Daofather Crimsonbright, but unexpectedly he did not." Patriarch Arcanum said excitedly, "If he had become apprenticed to Sword Immortal Evergreen, then for the sake of giving the Sword Immortal face, it wouldn't be appropriate for us to act. Now, however, we have nothing to worry about. Even if he became apprenticed to an expert of the Three Realms...that expert is not a member of the Crimsonbright League! He has no authority over us!"

"Thus, I feel...that we need to eradicate him as soon as possible! While he is merely a Void-level Earth Immortal, we need to eradicate him!" Patriarch Arcanum was extremely forceful in his words.

"That's reasonable!"

“Agreed.”

“A pity we don’t know who his master is.”

“Who cares who his master is? As long as he isn’t of our Crimsonbright League, what have we to worry about?”

The various major powers of the Three Realms were like local hegemony that dominated a specific region. It was very common for the Fiends and Immortals under their command to fight against and slaughter each other...and generally, the major powers wouldn’t intervene, so long as other major powers also didn’t intervene. The major powers would generally all be quite calm in watching those of the younger generation do battle.

Even when disciples died...the only thing that could be said was that their skills were insufficient.

Struggles and battles within the Three Realms were very common! Thus, as Patriarch Arcanum and the others saw it, Ning joining the Crimsonbright League would actually be much more troublesome; after all, that would mean they were all on the same side, and Ning’s master would be able to easily deal with them.

Since Ning had not joined the Crimsonbright League...things had become much easier for Patriarch Arcanum and the others.

“We have nothing to worry about, but it’s best to be cautious. I feel as though we need to figure out who his master is! The Three Realms have a number of madmen who are extremely protective of their disciples, and quite a few have even assaulted the Celestial Court in the past. One of them might just be willing to take revenge upon us for killing his disciple,” the handsome youth said.

“Mmm.”

“Sunfish’s words are reasonable.”

“Ji Ning’s master dared to abscond with him, giving our Crimsonbright League no face. I imagine his master...truly is an extremely audacious fellow.”

Patriarch Arcanum, hearing the words of his peers, couldn't help but frown. "What are you afraid of? First of all, there's very few madmen who would be truly willing to assault the territory of our Crimsonbright League; I refuse to believe that one of them just so happens to be his master. Secondly...even if one of them is, given the state of chaos the Three Realms are in, who would dare to act rashly in a time like this, even if they would do so normally?"

"Arcanum's words are reasonable, but as I see it, we should invite the Bloodcloud Hall to do it," said the wizened elder whose eyes remained closed this entire time.

Instantly, the room fell silent.

"Ask the Bloodcloud Hall?"

"That's going to cost quite a price."

"I imagine the Bloodcloud Hall will ask quite a bit."

Patriarch Arcanum, on the other hand, actually nodded. "Drywood's words are correct. Since everyone is worried about the mysterious master behind Ji Ning, then let us have the Bloodcloud Hall act instead. When they take on missions, they swear oaths to the Dao of the Heavens not to reveal anything; they won't let anyone know that it was us who asked them to do it. Spending a bit of treasure to buy some peace of mind...I feel that it is worth it!"

"Fine. I agree."

"Right. It's best to invite the Bloodcloud Hall; we can just consider it as us using some treasure to purchase Ji Ning's life."

"It's settled, then."

"Patriarch, you handle this matter."

Patriarch Arcanum nodded lightly. Naturally, he wouldn't decline. That very day, he quietly left this tower and headed to the Bloodcloud Hall.

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Deep within an enormous mountain that stretched hundreds of

thousands of kilometers.

Patriarch Arcanum arrived within a mountain gorge, holding an insignia. The mist within the gorge swirled everywhere, but deep within it, a large, tall teleportation tower could be seen.

“This way, please.” There was a member of the Bloodcloud Hall standing there, looking at Patriarch Arcanum.

With a single step, Patriarch Arcanum entered the grand teleportation array. The teleportation tower then lit up, and swoosh! Patriarch Arcanum disappeared.

.....

“Eh?” Patriarch Arcanum stood atop the clouds. Here, atop the clouds, there was another towering teleportation array.

Patriarch Arcanum stared into the distance. He saw a vast, endless sea of blood-colored clouds, and the faint outlines of a building hidden deep within it.

“That’s the Bloodcloud Hall?” Patriarch Arcanum felt startled.

The Bloodcloud Hall...

This was an extremely mysterious power. It had suddenly appeared thirty years ago, and it had handed these insignias to all of the major powers of the Grand Xia world. Only supreme powers of the likes of the Northmont clan of Stillwater or the Youngflame clan were qualified to receive these insignias. As for powers on the level the Black-White College, they weren’t even qualified to know about the Bloodcloud Hall’s existence.

By relying on the insignia, one could go to some mysterious places, then be teleported to a completely different world. Bloodcloud Hall was within this mysterious world.

No one knew there the Bloodcloud Hall was actually located!

“As long as one is willing to pay the price, any Immortal or Fiend in the world of the Grand Xia aside from the Xia Emperor can be assassinated

by our Bloodcloud Hall!” These were the bold words issued forth by the Bloodcloud Hall. And indeed, they truly did have tremendous, terrifying power; during the past thirty short years, they had already assassinated more than ten Celestial Immortal Patriarchs!

Bloodcloud Hall had thus become acknowledged by all the supreme powers as the ‘number one assassin’s guild of the Grand Xia’.

Bloodcloud Hall also protected its customers’ information, to the point of even swearing oaths to the Dao of the Heavens to not leak any of it at all.

Whoosh!

Patriarch Arcanum was quickly led to a quiet flower garden. Although he was led here, Patriarch Arcanum wasn’t sure about the path he had taken. “This Bloodcloud Hall must be an enormous, powerful estate-type magic treasure. Space within it is in a state of flux, and so I cannot determine the true pattern within it.”

Within the flower garden.

A silver-robed maiden was seated opposite of Patriarch Arcanum. Between the two of them lay a stone table, with a scroll placed atop it. The scroll was their contract.

“Kill Ji Ning?” The silver-robed maiden said softly, “He was the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny. He disappeared for thirty years; he was most likely taken by a True Immortal or Empyrean God as a disciple. In fact, there’s a sliver of a chance that it was a Daofather who took on a genius like him for a disciple. His Primaltwin was able to defeat a Loose Immortal all those years ago; I imagine his power must be much, much higher now. He might even be comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for a million years.”

“Are you taking the mission or not?” Patriarch Arcanum growled.

“We are. Of course we are.” The silver-robed woman laughed calmly. “As long as you are willing to pay the price.”

Chapter 6: An Arrival From the Deva Realm

“Price? What sort of price?” Patriarch Arcanum’s long, slender eyes narrowed as he looked at the silver-robed maiden.

The silver-robed maiden responded with a calm smile, “For example... three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic items, or items of equivalent value.”

The corners of Patriarch Arcanum’s eyes instantly twitched.

“Top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures? Three of them?” Patriarch Arcanum had heard that the Bloodcloud Hall charged a high price, but he was still stunned by what they requested.

“This Ji Ning has only trained for around seventy years!” Patriarch Arcanum couldn’t help but growl, “Less than a century! He is currently at most comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for five hundred thousand years! The chances of him being comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for a million years is virtually negligible. To kill a young fellow like him, you want to charge me three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures?”

“Don’t get angry. This is a business deal; both of us have to be willing to take part in it.” The silver-robed maiden laughed. “Indeed, the chance that Ji Ning has the power of a Loose Immortal who has lived a million years is very low...but the main issue with this mission does not lie with Ji Ning himself; Bloodcloud Hall holds a young fellow like him in no regard at all. The main issue with this mission is the master who stands behind him! He was the champion of the Conclave. His thirty-year disappearance...no one knows who his master is! Perhaps as we assassinate him, he will shatter some sort of talisman and his master will suddenly appear! Bloodcloud Hall estimates his master to be a True Immortal or Empyrean God at the very least; once his master appears, the squad which we sent out will undoubtedly perish! Since we are taking on a major risk, we naturally are going to request a high price!”

A Pure Yang True Immortal or an Empyrean God; either would be considered an expert of the Three Realms. In the world of the Grand Xia, the Xia Emperor was the only Pure Yang True Immortal present!

If the assassins Bloodcloud Hall sent out were to run into True Immortals or Empyrean Gods, they would unquestionably perish.

“Hmph.” Patriarch Arcanum shook his head. “Stop trying to fool me. When experts of the Three Realms train disciples, they all let them go out into the world to experience danger on their own. If their disciples are killed, those disciples can only blame themselves for being less skilled than their foes! How can experts and major powers of the Three Realms so casually intervene? That would be the same as abusing those of a lower status!”

The silver-robed maiden smiled. “Ji Ning’s background is significant. Three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic items, or treasures of an equivalent value. This is what Bloodcloud Hall requires!”

“You...” Patriarch Arcanum gritted his teeth.

“If you are unwilling, then you can leave, Celestial Immortal Arcanum.” The silver-robed maiden continued to smile at him.

“Fine!”

Patriarch Arcanum gritted his teeth, then pulled out some Immortal pills, spirit-ingredients, Immortal-ranked magic treasures, and an enormous amount of liquefied elemental essence. Although he had come prepared...top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures were very important for Celestial Immortals, and the Youngflame clan wouldn’t easily hand them out. They would rather use other treasures to make up for them.

“This should be enough.” A savage light flashed through Patriarch Arcanum’s eyes. His heart was bleeding at the cost.

“It is enough.” The silver-robed maiden nodded. “Celestial Immortal Arcanum, don’t worry; Bloodcloud Hall definitely won’t inform others of this assignment. I can swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens regarding

this. As for Ji Ning...Bloodcloud Hall will make careful preparations, so as to ensure our success. Within a year's time, he will die."

"Good. I'll await the good word from you, then." Patriarch Arcanum nodded.

Three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures. This was a price that was neither high nor low. Celestial Immortals who had lived as long as he had would generally all have several top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures on them. In fact, some truly supreme Celestial Immortal Patriarchs might even have Pure Yang treasures on them! Thus, for the Youngflame clan as a whole, producing three top-grade Immortal-ranked treasures would cause a bit of heartache but not bankrupt them. At a critical time like this, with the Three Realms in a state of turbulence, they were willing to pay this level of price in order to eliminate a threat.

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The imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

Ning was standing atop a cloud, flying through the wide streets of the imperial capital. He had spent a day within the Black-White College of Stillwater, then had visited his good friend Northmont Baiwei before heading to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia. This was a time of turbulence in the Three Realms, after all; the sooner he could purchase materials for setting up formations, the better.

"King Yan's Estate." Ning saw a familiar estate from the distance. After having arrived, he was naturally going to first visit his cousin before going to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.

Swoosh. Ning led the Whitewater Hound in flying to the estate, Little Qing wrapped around his arm as always.

"You are young master Ji Ning?" The estate guards recognized him right away, and they revealed looks of surprise on their faces. Thirty years was a fairly short period of time for Immortal cultivators; they had begun their services here well over thirty years ago, and so they naturally recognized him.

“I wish to see the princess,” Ning said.

“Young master Ji Ning, please wait a moment. I’ll go make the report right away.” Instantly, a guard flew into the estate to make the report.

Soon, a group of people came out from the estate, the leader being his cousin, Princess Xiyue.

“Ji Ning.” Princess Xiyue looked at Ning, an expression of excitement instantly covering her face. “I just heard last night from the Heavenly Treasures Mountain that you returned. I was planning to go find you after finishing some affairs here.”

“It should be me who comes to visit you, Princesss.” Ning noticed that next to her was a tall, handsome man with white skin who appeared to be rather close to her. He couldn’t help but laugh. “This is...?”

“Oh.” An awkward expression appeared on Princess Xiyue’s face. She immediately said, “This is young master Feng Yungu from the Windlocked Isles of the Deva Realm.”

“I’ve long heard of your famous name, brother Ji Ning. Today, I see that you truly are extraordinary.” The tall, handsome young master Yungu spoke in a modest manner.

Ning gave him a glance, then nodded in secret; this Feng Yunge acted quite modestly and put on no airs.

“Hurry on in. Why are you standing here in the doorway?” Princess Xiyue said hurriedly while sending a stealthy mental message to Ning. “Cousin, unless something unexpected happens, this young master Yungu will most likely become my husband.”

“Ah?” Ning was mentally stunned. He hurriedly sent back, “Cousin, the two of you...?”

“He will marry into King Yan’s Estate,” Princess Xiyue sent to him. “In the future, I am going to resurrect the Yuchi clan; thus, I can’t marry out into another clan. As for this young master Yungu...because the Grand Xia Dynasty is allied with the Windlocked Isles of the Deva Realm, quite a few of the imperial Xia clansmen have become Dao-companions with

the disciples of the Windlocked Isles. I could tell that he's not bad, and he's also quite obedient; he was even willing to marry into King Yan's Estate. That's why I decided to accept him as my Dao-companion."

Ning now understood.

The Windlocked Isles of the Deva Realm?

The Grand Xia Dynasty?

"He's not only willing to marry into her family, he's also obedient to her wishes...and I can tell that he seems to be the humble sort." Ning nodded privately. His cousin was completely focused on vengeance; a husband like this would perhaps be good for her.

"Cousin, you don't need to pay too much attention to young master Yungu; his status in the Windlocked Isles of the Deva Realm isn't very high, and his power is ordinary, but he's an extremely good-natured person," Princess Xiyue sent. "However...another disciple of the Windlocked Isles is currently present within King Yan's Estate. He, too, is pursuing me; he wants to marry me and take me back to the Windlocked Isles with him. His name is Feng Yunpeng; his status within the Windlocked Isles is extremely high! He is one of the two sons of the master of the Windlocked Isles, and the Grand Xia Emperor long ago instructed the imperial Xia clansmen are not to cause trouble with him. You need to be careful as well."

"Oh? Don't worry," Ning replied.

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They entered the estate.

Yuchi Xiyue prepared a welcoming banquet for Ning. The three of them chatted quite happily with each other. Young master Yungu seemed to have a bit of an innately self-abasing character; in front of Ning, at least, he acted very modestly and self-deprecatingly.

"Hahaha, I heard that the champion of the Grand Xia's Conclave of Immortal Destiny, the peerless genius Ji Ning, had arrived here at King Yan's Estate. Xiyue, why didn't you inform me? You were wrong in not

doing so.” Accompanying a loud laughter, a youth dressed in gaudy golden Daoist robes came walking in. The youth’s eyes twinkled like the stars, and his aura was quite extraordinary.

Behind him were two powerful servants. One had the aura of a Fiendgod; he was most likely a Void-level Fiendgod! The other was an extremely powerful Loose Immortal.

“Young master Yunpeng, I didn’t want to disturb you,” Princess Xiyue said with a laugh. “Please sit.”

Feng Yungu hurriedly rose to give up his own seat, sitting down in a lower seat. As for young master Yunpeng, he sat down directly after Princess Xiyue, face to face with Ji Ning.

“Ji Ning, this is young master Yunpeng, a genius of the Windlocked Isles of the Deva Realm. He, too, is an expert who is a Void-level Earth Immortal,” Princess Xiyue said hurriedly.

“Greetings to you, young master Yunpeng,” Ning said, clasping his hands slightly.

Young master Yunpeng gave Ning a clearly rather indifferent glance, but as he did, his face changed slightly. With a laugh, he said, “Oh, so you’ve become a Void-level Earth Immortal, Ji Ning.”

“Just the early-stage Void-level. Compared to you, young master Yunpeng, I’m a bit lacking,” Ning said modestly.

“Hahaha...” Young master Yunpeng laughed smugly. “I hear that you are on very good terms with Xiyue. You have to help me dissuade her! She’s insisting on marrying that useless thing over there; isn’t that an utter desecration of a heavenly treasure?” As he spoke, he gave the nearby Feng Yungu a disdainful look.

No matter how good of a temper Feng Yungu had, he couldn’t prevent his face from changing...but immediately afterwards, he lowered his head slightly.

Young master Yunpeng’s laughter became even more wanton. “Xiyue and I, by contrast, are a perfect match!” As he spoke, he reached his hand

out to stroke Princess Xiyue's. Princess Xiyue moved away slightly, her face sinking. "Young master Yunpeng."

"Fine, fine, fine. I won't rush things." Young master Yunpeng laughed.

After all, Princess Xiyue had a Celestial Immortal, King Yan, behind her. Given that the Windlocked Isles were an ally of the Grand Xia Dynasty, he didn't want to cause any problems either.

"Young master Yunpeng." Ning felt an extreme distaste towards this person, but he still changed the subject. "I hear that you come from the Windlocked Isles of the Deva Realm. I haven't been to the Deva Realm yet; why don't you tell me about of the Deva Realm and help broaden my horizons?"

Young master Yunpeng frowned. Introduce the Deva Realm? Him? Who did Ji Ning think he was? Asking him to introduce the Deva Realm to him?

Still...he gave Princess Xiyue a sidelong glance, then said with a calm snort, "The Deva Realm is quite large. The eastern part of the Deva Realm is managed by the Celestial Court, while the western side is managed by the Buddhists of Mount Ling 1. But of course, there are many asuras and devas who live throughout the Deva Realm, and they have naturally joined together to form powers. Our Windlocked Isles can be considered one of those powers, I suppose."

"I heard that after you became the champion of the Conclave, Ji Ning, you decided not to take on Sword Immortal Evergreen as your master, and you also didn't take on any of the Immortals or Fiends of Daofather Crimsonbright's league as your master. Instead, you vanished...I wonder, where did you go, brother Ji Ning?" Young master Yunpeng's eyes lit up as he asked this question; clearly, he was quite curious about this.

"Naturally, I went to study with my master," Ning said calmly.

"Who?" Yunpeng asked. "Where did you study?"

"Master has ordered that I cannot tell others." Ning shook his head.

Young master Yunpeng couldn't help but frown.

Ning disliked this young master Yunpeng very much. He immediately said, “Princess Xiyue, I’m going to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to buy some items. I’ll leave now.”

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1. In Chinese mythology, Mount Ling is the place where the Buddha and his bodhisattvas reside.

Chapter 7: A Single Arrow

In truth, Princess Xiyue could tell that this young master Yunpeng wasn't a decent person. Although Ji Ning had endured it for her sake, in his bones, he remained a proud person; if too much time passed, problems would most likely occur. She immediately agreed, "Alright, Ji Ning, you can go to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. We'll meet some other time."

"The Heavenly Treasures Mountain?" Young master Yunpeng raised an eyebrow, glancing sideways at Ning, then immediately said, "Xiyue, it's been a long time since we've gone to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. Since brother Ji Ning is going, let's go with him. Yungu, would you agree?"

Feng Yungu had been sitting there quietly this entire time. Upon hearing young master Yunpeng speak, he hurriedly nodded. "Sure, sure."

Ning, seeing this, couldn't help but frown. This person his cousin wanted to get married to was a bit too craven.

"Xiyue!" Young master Yunpeng looked towards Princess Xiyue, who could only nod. "Fine, let's go together then."

.....

Ji Ning, Princess Xiyue, young master Yunpeng, and Feng Yungu were naturally accompanied by a host of servants. They all rode aboard an Immortal-ranked flying ship, and in an awe-inspiring manner, they flew out into the imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

"This high-grade Immortal-ranked treasure-vessel of mine has been infused with an 'Azure Polaris Spirit'; in terms of speed alone, it is comparable to a top-grade Immortal-ranked flying ship," young master Yunpeng said in an extremely smug manner.

Ning glanced sideways at him.

This young master Yunpeng really did have quite a few treasures; to buy an Immortal-ranked flying ship such as this, even five million kilograms would be far from sufficient.

"Little brother, just endure it for now," Princess Xiyue sent mentally to

Ning. “Although this young master Yunpeng is quite talented in cultivation, he is innately arrogant and overbearing. Still...since his Windlocked Isles and our Grand Xia Dynasty are allied, he wouldn’t dare cause too much trouble. Just ignore the crap he is spewing out, little brother.”

“Cousin, given how arrogant and overbearing he is, why are you letting him remain within the King’s estate?” Ning sent back and asked, “I trust that if King Yan asked him to leave, he definitely wouldn’t stay.”

“Although he’s arrogant and overbearing, he’s trying to woo me; naturally, he often buys some gifts for me,” Princess Xiyue said. “In order to rebuild the Yuchi clan in the future, I naturally need to store up some treasures for it.”

“Cousin, you...” Ning was flabbergasted.

“Are you starting to look down on me, cousin?” Princess Xiyue sent back calmly, “I don’t care about these matters; I swore an oath long ago that I would definitely carry out my father’s wishes. I will rebuild the Yuchi clan! For the sake of the Yuchi clan, I am willing to do anything... including give up my life! All I need to do right now is endure this young master Yunpeng’s nonsense and give him a bit of hope, and he’ll continue to often gift me with treasures.”

Ning truly didn’t know what to say.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let him take any advantage of me whatsoever; the best thing in the world is the thing you cannot get. If I let him take advantage of me, he wouldn’t be pursuing me in such a fervent manner. His treasures? I’ll take them. But him? In the end, he’ll just slink away in disgrace!” Princess Xiyue sent back.

Ning could sense the determination within his cousin’s heart. He couldn’t help but say with worry, “That Feng Yungu...I feel as though the two of you...”

“You feel he isn’t worth of me, right? It is precisely because he is an absolute good-for-nothing coward that I am willing to marry him. Otherwise...how could I be able to completely control him?” Princess

Xiyue sent back. "Don't worry. I have Grandpa's help; I can take care of small matters like this."

"Cousin, if there's anything you need, arrange for a message to be sent to me. Don't forget that I, too, am of the Yuchi clan," Ning sent mentally.

"Right. I still have you, little brother," Princess Xiyue sent back.

The main headquarters of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.

Within an extremely tall and luxuriously decorated banquet hall, a feast was in procession. The pillars outside this hall were so tall that someone standing atop the pillars could stare down at the entire imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

"Young master Yunpeng, you brought little sister Xiyue again. It seems as though our Heavenly Treasures Mountain is about to have even more business come our way," the white-robed Fairy Azurewillow said with a smile.

"Hahaha! It pleases me to do this for Xiyue!" Young master Yunpeng laughed loudly, giving Ning a sidelong glance.

On the way over, Ning and Yuchi Xiyue had constantly been sending mental messages to each other. Young master Yunpeng had noticed...that the relationship between them seemed to be clearly much closer than the relationship two ordinary friends would have! This caused him to feel rather displeased inside. "Hmph, he's merely the champion of the Grand Xia Dynasty's Conclave! Today, here at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, I'm going to cause you to lose tremendous face!"

"Brother Ji Ning, what have you come to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to purchase?" Young master Yunpeng said with a laugh.

Ning said calmly, "Just some materials and raw ingredients."

Right at this moment, the Whitewater Hound by Ning's side transformed into human form. Uncle White waved his hand and two hidebound scrolls flew from him to Ning. Uncle White sent mentally, "Ning, child, there's a list of items here for setting down layers formations that are capable of overawing even Celestial Immortals, making them

afraid to trespass within.”

“The second list consists of the items necessary to set down three supremely ferocious formations that I found at Mount Innerheart. In addition, these three supremely ferocious formations can even link with each other...they are so powerful that I imagine even True Immortals and Empyrean Gods would be wary of them. There is no way True Immortals and Empyrean Gods can force their way through these three formations; only True Immortals and Empyrean Gods who are experts at formations might be able to break them.”

“They are that incredible?!” Ning was shocked.

“However...the treasures needed on the second list are quite precious, even though they aren’t extremely rare,” Uncle White sent. “If you don’t have enough, then just buy the items on the first list; that will be enough.”

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Ning handed over the two hidebound scrolls to Fairy Azurewillow. “Fairy Azurewillow, take a look at the list of ingredients and materials on these two scrolls. Does your Heavenly Treasures Mountain have them?”

“This is the main headquarters of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain; even if Celestial Immortals came here to shop, we’d be able to accommodate them, much less just a few precious materials.” Smiling, Fairy Azurewillow accepted the lists. Upon seeing the first one, however, her face instantly changed. She gave Ning a surprised glance, and then she looked at the second hidebound scroll.

This time, Fairy Azurewillow was truly stunned!

She was just a bit surprised upon seeing the first list, but the second list truly stunned her...because the items requested were simply too shocking!

“I’m not cleared to handle something like this. A moment, please,” Fairy Azurewillow said.

“Fine.” Ning nodded.

“Fairy Azurewillow, even you aren’t cleared?” Young master Yunpeng, watching from the side, smirked. “It’s just a few ingredients and raw materials, not Immortal-ranked magic treasures. Can it be that the items which brother Ji Ning have chosen are extremely strange and rare?”

Whoosh.

A silver-haired man appeared out of nowhere within the hall. The invisible pressure and presence he gave off...everyone present understood that he was a Celestial Immortal!

“Patriarch.” Fairy Azurewillow handed the two hidebound scrolls to him. “These are the lists of ingredients which Ji Ning needs. There are two lists.”

The silver-haired man nodded, accepted the lists, then looked at the first one. He said calmly, “The first list will require 4.3 million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence!”

Yuchi Xiyue, Feng Yungu, and the others all felt a sense of pressure.

More than four million kilograms?

“Pretty pricy,” the nearby young master Yunpeng said in a nonchalant manner.

The silver-haired man then looked at the second hidebound scroll. When he did, even his face couldn’t help but change. After staring for a long moment, he lifted his head to look at Ning, a complicated look in his eyes. “Young friend Ji Ning...are you sure you aren’t playing a little joke on us?”

“Since I’ve written a list, I naturally wish to buy the items on it,” Ning said calmly.

“How much liquefied elemental essence does the second list cost?” Young master Yunpeng asked. He felt that he was quite wealthy and magnanimous; he would be able to afford even a top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasure.

“Liquefied elemental essence?” The silver-haired man shook his head.

“Treasures like this...no amount of liquefied elemental essence is enough for them.”

Young master Yunpeng's face changed.

Fairy Azurewillow, Princess Xiyue, Feng Yungu, and the others were all stunned. They were all fairly experienced, and so they knew...liquefied elemental essence was fairly useful for those below the Celestial Immortal level, but was of increasingly little use to the true experts of the Three Realms. For example, Ning had to use Immortal pills in order to train in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art].

True Immortals and Daofathers absorbed prodigious amounts of natural elemental ki; thus, ordinary liquefied elemental essence was like water to them; it was extremely common.

True treasures could only be traded for using other treasures!

“How much at least?” Ning asked.

“At least ten top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures,” the silver-haired man said. “Or a low-grade Pure Yang treasure.”

“Pure Yang treasure?”

Everyone present was shocked.

Ning, however, was quite calm. These materials were to be used to set up a series of formations so ferocious that they could block even True Immortals or Empyrean Gods, unless the True Immortals or Empyrean Gods were extremely skilled in the art of formations. To be able to set up formations of such power for the cost of merely a single low-grade Pure Yang magic treasure...that wasn't bad at all.

“At least ten top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures? Not even ordinary Celestial Immortals have that much. All of my treasures combined would most likely be worth just three or four top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures.” Young master Yunpeng felt an enormous pressure bear down upon him. He was proud of how wealthy he was and how many treasures he had, but he was now completely stunned. “There's no way he can afford that. No way.” He stared fixedly at Ning.

Everyone was staring at Ning.

“Will this treasure suffice?” Ning waved his hand, and instantly a faint tidal wave of fire burst forth it. Within Ning’s palm there was a fiery arrow!

This arrow was the arrow which Ning had acquired from the gorge within the Riverfang Mountains. The most precious treasures the Fiendgod corpse had on it consisted of the high-grade Protocosmic ‘Rahu Bow’ and the two fiery arrows.

Truly powerful, divine archers all had custom-made arrows, and the price of each arrow was prodigious. Ning had chatted with the Rahu Bow before, and the Rahu Bow had said this: “This type of arrow is known as a ‘Firetruth Arrow’; although they are vastly inferior to me in value, each of them are still comparable to a low-grade Pure Yang treasure in value.”

Ning had sighed in amazement upon hearing this as well.

Every single arrow would cost him the equivalent of a low-grade Pure Yang treasure. How could he not feel heartache at the cost?

Rumble...with the appearance of the flaming arrow came a powerful aura of might.

“This is...?” The silver-haired man’s face changed. He carefully inspected the arrow, even using his coresense on it.

“A single arrow?” Young master Yunpeng actually secretly shook his head.

“Can it be that a single arrow is comparable to ten top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures?” Both Princess Xiyue and Fairy Azurewillow were puzzled. Although they were experienced, they knew very little about the truly powerful divine archers of the Three Realms.

After inspecting the arrow for a long time, the silver-haired man looked towards Ning. He said in a low voice, “It suffices!”

“I also need you to add an extra fifteen million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence into the deal!” Ning said calmly.

Princess Xiyue and the others were all stunned.

The silver-haired man hesitated a moment, then nodded seriously. “Fine. Our Heavenly Treasures Mountain can add another fifteen million kilograms into the mix!”

Young master Yunpeng’s face changed. He couldn’t help but swallow, his earlier arrogance, smugness, and brashness all evaporating. His greatest source of pride was in his wealth, but he suddenly realized that a single arrow from Ning had completely crushed him in this respect. As for backers? Given that Ning had vanished for thirty years, he at least had a True Immortal or Empyrean God as a backer; in this respect as well, Ning was definitely not inferior to him.

Chapter 8: Qi, the Primordial Divine Archer

Princess Xiyue, Fairy Azurewillow, Feng Yungu, and the others were watching in amazement. That arrow in Ji Ning's hand...it was actually worth such a precious amount of money! This was simply inconceivable.

However...Ning had always been a man of mysteries.

When he had first arrived at the imperial capital of the Grand Xia, he had purchased the elemental peacock plumes. Afterwards, he had seized the championship of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny...and then refused to accept Sword Immortal Evergreen as his master, instead disappearing for over thirty years. Upon his return, his power had increased greatly; for him to now produce an arrow of such great value wasn't too inconceivable, all things considered!

However, this arrow was simply too valuable; the likes of Princess Xiyue could only feel shock and awe, rather than jealousy.

"Damn. Damn!" Young master Yunpeng, however, felt extremely jealous right now. He was the unhappiest of the lot.

"How could the arrow which Ji Ning produced be worth this much?!" Young master Yunpeng knew that his personal strength was perhaps inferior to Ning's, but he had felt certain that he had far more treasures! This was his greatest source of self-confidence...but a single arrow from Ning had completely crushed him in this regard.

Young master Yunpeng felt unhappy. Deeply unhappy!

"Fine. Then I'll engage in this trade with the Heavenly Treasures Mountain," Ning said.

"I'll go make the arrangements." The silver-haired man nodded, then immediately began sending mental messages to make the arrangements.

Ning suddenly turned his head to glance at Princess Xiyue. Smiling, he said, "Princess, when I first entered the imperial capital of the Grand Xia,

I was surrounded by danger, but you stretched out your hand to aid me. To this very day, I haven't had a chance to repay you...if there's anything you wish to buy today, Princess, then I, Ji Ning, will buy it for you as a gift."

"Eh?" Princess Xiyue was startled.

"This Ji Ning..." A hint of anger instantly flashed past young master Yunpeng's eyes. He had been wooing Princess Xiyue this entire time, and had been relying on his wealth to do so! For Ning to suddenly plan to give her gifts as well...if his gifts were more valuable, then that would be the same as crushing him underfoot.

The nearby Feng Yungu raised his head to give Ning a glance as well.

Fairy Azurewillow said, "Young master Ji Ning, Xiyue has been hoping for a mobile Immortal estate that she could carry on her person, but even the cheapest of such estates would cost at least five hundred thousand kilograms of liquefied elemental essence. Alas, young master Yunpeng wasn't quite willing to part with such a sum."

Young master Yunpeng's face instantly turned white.

Five hundred thousand kilograms wasn't a small figure; it was enough to purchase an ordinary low-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasure! If he were to casually toss out half a million kilograms just to chase after a girl...if this sort of gift-giving became habitual and he ended up failing, he would probably be out five million kilograms or more! Succeeding was one thing, but failure meant it would have all been for nothing! Although young master Yunpeng was the son of the master of the Windlocked Isles, he still had to calculate his expenditures. The most valuable gift he had given Princess Xiyue was worth merely a hundred or two hundred thousand kilograms or so; over the course of the past half year, all of his gifts combined were worth just barely half a million kilograms.

"Azurewillow." Princess Xiyue was rather unhappy.

"A mobile Immortal estate?" Ning suddenly laughed. "I was once lucky enough to acquire such an estate, but since I already had one, I've never used the second one. It's the perfect present for you, Princess."

Ning waved his hand, and a small, exquisitely designed Immortal estate appeared within his palm, glowing with golden light.

Everyone present turned to look at it.

“This Immortal estate...?” Everyone was curious. Even young master Yunpeng frowned as he looked at it; none of them could quite tell how valuable it was.

Ning laughed.

After he had successfully overcome the fifth level of the Wargod Hall, he had acquired a set of Heaven-ranked magic treasure, the Waterbreaker Godshark Swords. After becoming champion of the Conclave, he had arrived at Mount Innerheart, and during his thirty-plus years there Ning’s [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] had broken through to the thirteenth stage. Since that represented an advance to the Primal Daoist level, he had been permitted to choose another Heaven-ranked magic treasure from the Treasure Hall.

By then, Ning already knew that Heaven-ranked magic treasures weren’t going to be of much use to him in the future; what he needed was Immortal-ranked treasures.

However...Ning couldn’t let this opportunity of choosing a treasure from the Treasure Hall to go to waste. Thus, Ning had chosen an item that was of fairly high value; simply put, he had chosen an item that he could use to sell for a great deal of liquefied elemental essence. Thus, he had chosen a mobile Immortal estate, a ‘Goldlight Immortal Estate’. Ning had been planning to sell it here to trade for Immortal-ranked magic treasures, but he had risen in power more quickly than even he had expected, and had acquired the treasures left behind by that ancient Fiendgod corpse. By now, this Goldlight Immortal Estate was nothing to him.

Ning’s set of Waterbreaker Godshark Swords were worth roughly one million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence! This Goldlight Immortal Estate, however, was on an even higher level of value!

“What generosity and magnanimity, young friend Ji Ning! Your gift to a

beauty is actually an Immortal estate such as this.” The silver-haired man laughed. “This Immortal estate is worth at least four million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence!”

“Four million kilograms!?” Fairy Azurewillow, who had intentionally been causing some trouble, was shocked as well.

“That much?” Princess Xiyue felt that this was far too much.

Young master Yunpeng’s face became even more unsightly. “Four million kilograms...how can this Ji Ning be willing to give up an estate like this? How can he?!”

He hadn’t even been willing to buy an Immortal estate that was worth half a million kilograms, but now Ning’s very first gift was worth four million kilograms. How could the ‘wealthy’ young master Yunpeng not feel choked?

“It’s too much. Too much.” Princess Xiyue shook her head hurriedly.

“This is nothing to me,” Ning laughed. “And I’m preparing to stay at King Yan’s Estate for quite some time; how can I stay for so long without bringing a little gift?”

“Quite some time?”

Young master Yunpeng felt even more miserable now.

He was staying at King Yan’s Estate. If Ning stayed here as well, they would repeatedly run into each other. In terms of reputation...Ning surpassed him, as he had become champion of the Conclave. In terms of background...Ning’s backer was probably more formidable. In terms of personal strength...given that Ning’s Primaltwin had been able to kill Loose Immortals when it had been merely at the Primal Daoist level, there was no need to even compare the two of them. And now in terms of wealth...young master Yunpeng’s wealth had been his greatest source of confidence, but even in this regard, he had been crushed in an utterly dominating manner!

More importantly of all...

The princess didn't like him!

She would rather marry Feng Yungu than marry him. Previously, young master Yunpeng had felt that he was superior to Feng Yungu in every way, which was why he had felt so confident when staying at King Yan's Estate. But now...Ji Ning had appeared! Ji Ning crushed in him every aspect, and he appeared to be so close to the princess!

"Xiyue," Young master Yunpeng suddenly said.

"Hm?" Princess Xiyue looked towards him.

Young master Yunpeng smiled. "I've spent quite a bit of time here at the Grand Xia Dynasty. It's time to go back to the Deva Realm. Help me convey my thanks to King Yan; I won't be going back to King Yan's Estate."

"Let's go!" Young master Yunpeng immediately led his two servants away.

Just like that...

Young master Yunpeng departed!

Princess Xiyue was startled for a moment, and then she looked towards Ning. She sent mentally, "Little brother, this was your plan all along, right? You wanted to force him to leave?"

"He's the son of the master of the Windlocked Isles; someone like him is naturally the proud sort. The reason why he was at King Yan's Estate was because he felt he was superior to Feng Yungu in every way," Ning sent back. "All I had to do was to make him feel as though he was inferior to me in every single way, as though he would feel miserable every time he saw me. Given that you don't like him, cousin...of course he would choose to leave on his own, rather than feel angry all the time here!"

"You..." Princess Xiyue sent resignedly, "Fine. Since you've chased off that little rich boy, you can put away your mobile Immortal estate. This is a critical point in time for you; you'll need many treasures for the upcoming storm."

“Cousin, I gave you this Immortal estate, which means it is yours! A few million kilograms is a minor sum to me now; compared to this arrow of mine, it is worth far, far less. In addition, I’ve received an extra fifteen million kilograms today; there’s no need for you to refuse, cousin,” Ning sent back.

Princess Xiyue looked towards Ning.

“And...I really don’t want you to force yourself to suffer. Even if you are to choose a Dao-companion, you should choose someone you like. Don’t casually choose someone like this Feng Yungu,” Ning sent mentally. “Don’t let yourself suffer any further.”

Princess Xiyue suddenly felt an ache in her heart. She couldn’t prevent the tears from coming to her eyes.

“Treasures, liquefied elemental essence...your little brother has them!”

“If enemies come...your little brother will help you kill them!”

“Take this Immortal estate, elder sister. In the future, when your little brother grows even stronger...forget about Immortal-ranked magic treasures, I’ll even be able to casually gift you with a set of ten Pure Yang treasures,” Ning sent solemnly.

Princess Xiyue looked at Ning. “Alright.”

Ning smiled.

The resurrection of the Yuchi clan!

This wasn’t just his cousin’s wish; this was Ning’s wish as well. Although his mother had never spoken to him of it, Ning could sense that his mother had always been thinking of her Yuchi clan. His mother’s heart was not with the Ji clan; it had always been with her Yuchi clan.

For the sake of his mother...Ning, too, wished to resurrect the Yuchi clan!

Thus, this was a task for not just his cousin, but also himself!

“Xiyue, look at how excited you are. You are so excited that you are crying!” Fairy Azurewillow laughed, “But if someone were to give me a

mobile Immortal estate, I'd be extremely excited as well. Young master Ji Ning..." As she spoke, she looked towards Ning.

"I found a Dao-companion long ago," Ning said hurriedly.

"Oh. I heard about this; the Rainbowflame Fairy, Yu Wei. She's Patriarch Lu's disciple." Fairy Azurewillow suddenly turned her head as a black-robed elder walked over, respectfully handing over a storage-type bracelet to the silver-haired man.

The silver-haired man handed it straight to Ning. "Young friend Ji Ning, take a look; are these the items from the list that you needed?"

"Uncle White, take a look," Ning said.

Uncle White nodded. He immediately bound the storage bracelet, then quickly began to scan through the many precious materials within it.

Someone without sufficient skill wouldn't be able to set up such peerlessly ferocious formations, even if they had all the necessary materials. Even Uncle White merely understood how to set up these three supreme formations; he didn't truly understand the mysteries within them. This was because they were simply far too complicated; that was why even True Immortals or Empyrean Gods would find it hard to break through them.

"Everything's correct." Uncle White nodded.

The nearby silver-haired man instantly smiled, then handed Ning a jade bottle. "There are fifteen million kilograms within."

"Then let this arrow go to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain." Ning handed it over to him.

"Precisely speaking...it goes to the Xia Emperor," the silver-haired man said with a laugh.

Ning was startled for a moment, but then he nodded.

Behind the Heavenly Treasures Mountain stood the Grand Xia Emperor.

"Now that this deal is concluded...young friend Ji Ning, if you acquire any other treasures, our Heavenly Treasures Mountain will always

welcome you here to sell them. I, Skyfox, will personally come welcome you.” Only now did the silver-haired man tell them his name.

“Skyfox?” Ning was secretly startled. “So it’s him?”

The Grand Xia Emperor had two spirit-beasts who had become Celestial Immortals. One was a skyfox, and it was this skyfox who had established the Heavenly Treasures Mountain for the Grand Xia Emperor. He was in complete control of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.

.....

Within the darkness of space.

A blurred figure was seated in the lotus position. Suddenly, a silver-haired man appeared out of nowhere within the void.

“Master, here is the arrow which Ji Ning just traded to our Heavenly Treasures Mountain.” The silver-haired man respectfully offered the arrow. The flaming arrow hovered there in space, emanating ripples of power.

“This arrow...this is a Firetruth Arrow. It is the most famous type of arrow which was created by Divine Archer ‘Qi’ 1 of the Primordial Era. Even I would perish under the power of a single one of these arrows,” the black-robed Xia Emperor said in a low voice.

He was of the lineage of the imperial clan of the Primordial Era, and had lived through that period of time. Even in the Primordial World of Pangu, there were only a few extremely famous divine archers. All of them had their own specialties, and anyone could recognize their arrows at a single glance.

“When Pangu’s Primordial World was shattered, the most powerful treasures were quickly seized away by the various major powers. Since Ji Ning has acquired one of these arrows...then he most likely has a connection to one of those major powers; otherwise, how could he have acquired a treasure like this?! In addition, Ji Ning didn’t apprentice himself to anyone in Daofather Crimsonbright’s league...but Master actually ordered me not to investigate this matter. Ji Ning must have a

Daofather behind him.”

“Keep a close eye on Ji Ning. The Three Realms are currently in a state of chaos; Ji Ning can become our friend, but he absolutely must not become our enemy.” The black-robed Xia Emperor’s voice echoed forth within the darkness of the void.

*

1. Qi was the son of Yu the Great, founding emperor of the the historical Xia Dynasty.

Chapter 9: Laying Down the Formations

“Cousin, no need to send me off.”

Ji Ning was bidding Princess Xiyue farewell in midair.

“Didn’t you say earlier that you were going to stay at King Yan’s Estate for an extended period of time? Why are you leaving after shopping at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain?” Princess Xiyue truly didn’t wish to part with him. Her grandfather, King Yan, had just recently become a Celestial Immortal; thus, he spent much of his time in secluded meditation, and rarely had time to accompany her. In addition, Ji Ning was of a similar age to her; there were many topics she could discuss with him but not her grandfather. Naturally, she wanted him to stay longer by her side.

“Given that the Grand Xia world is now filled with dangerous undercurrents, I need to go back as soon as possible and set up layers of formations around the Ji clan’s Swallow Mountain region,” Ning said. “I will permanently stay in the Swallow Mountain region. If you are free, you can come visit me there.”

“Permanently?” Princess Xiyue was surprised.

“Right.” Ning nodded.

He had acquired many techniques at Mount Innerheart, be it Ki Refining, Fiendgod Body Refining, or sword-arts manuals. All of them provided guidance towards the level of Daofather of the Great Firmament. He also had the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], the [Starseizing Hand], [Houyi’s Archery], and the [Torch Dragon’s Eye], some of the most supreme divine abilities of the Three Realms. He needed to spend time on training these techniques.

Given that the Three Realms were about to be engulfed by a storm... Ning did indeed plan to permanently live at Serpentwing Lake as he awaited Yu Wei’s return.

“That’s good. I’ll be able to find you there whenever I want. You need to be careful; my grandfather also told me that the world has been quite

chaotic lately. Even multiple Celestial Immortals have perished,” Princess Xiyue said.

“I know. Don’t worry. Others might be able to kill Celestial Immortals, but killing me will be very difficult,” Ning said.

“Oh?” Princess Xiyue revealed a look of surprise.

Ning laughed. “Don’t forget that I just returned after studying with my master. Alright, enough talk; I need to go now.”

And then, Ning led Little Qing and Uncle White in using a spatial teleportation to vanish from the air above the imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

“This little brother of mine...it seems as though these thirty-plus years have been extraordinary for him.” Princess Xiyue let out a relieved sigh. The more powerful Ning became, the more relaxed she would be.

“However...his words were a bit too much. ‘Others might be able to kill Celestial Immortals, but killing him will be very difficult’? It’s like he’s implying he’s more powerful than Celestial Immortals. I imagine that his master probably bestowed some sort of protective item upon him.”

Swoosh.

Princess Xiyue charged downwards towards her residence, flying back into King Yan’s Estate.

This time, Princess Xiyue’s guess was wrong. In terms of power, Ning truly was on the level of a Celestial Immortal Patriarch by now. Most importantly of all, Ning had trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]; it would be extremely difficult for others to injure him. And through the ‘Seventy-Two Transformations’ the arcane art permitted...if he transformed into the Grand Xia Emperor, even King Yan probably wouldn’t be able to tell any difference at all.

This was why, generally speaking, those who trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] were incredibly talented in staying alive. Ning’s training in the arcane art was the reason why Patriarch Subhuti had permitted Ning to depart from his tutelage.

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“Master, Ji Ning suddenly left Stillwater City and headed towards the imperial capital.”

“The imperial capital remains the most dangerous place in the Grand Xia world for us. That’s not the place for the assassination. Continue to watch over him.”

“Yes.”

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Swallow Mountain.

After using a spatial teleport to return here from the imperial capital of the Grand Xia, Ning immediately summoned the high-level Ji clansmen. The latest generation of Wanxiang Adepts and Zifu Disciples were all clustered together in one hall, including the likes of Ji Mo and the others who had been provided guidance by Ning. Now that the clan had a stable footing, all of their talents received good resources for cultivation; their situation was far better than the situation had been in the past for Ji Ninefire, Ji Truekeep, and the others. Thus Ji Mo, for example, had already become a Wanxiang Adept.

Only upon being summoned here did they learn that Ji Ning had returned! All of them were utterly overcome with joy. The younger generation of Ji clansmen had long ago begun to idolize Ning; after all, becoming the champion of the Conclave was something out of legends! That was an event where the geniuses of the entire world came together in a competition!

“I agree! Of course I agree. Stillwater Commandery is in a chaotic state right now; if Uncle Ji Ning plans to set down layers of mighty formations around Swallow Mountain, then that means that our Ji clan shall have a foundation that will flourish for countless generations!”

“Right. With these grand formations, we will no longer need to fear the Youngflame clan.”

“I agree.”

“I agree as well.”

Not a single Ji clansmen was in opposition. Ning’s words were like music to their ears! Ning had told them that once the formations were established, even Celestial Immortal Patriarchs could forget about barging through them. Only individuals who surpassed the power of Celestial Immortals had a chance of making it through!

It must be understood that in the entire world of the Grand Xia...even for the likes of ancient clans that had existed since the Fiendgod Era, such as the Northmont clan of Stillwater or the Youngflame clan, Celestial Immortals represented the height of their power.

With these grand formations protecting it, Swallow Mountain would become an absolutely secure location; the Ji clan could safely and stably flourish within this place!

A truly powerful clan had to have an extremely safe base. Some of them even hid their headquarters within unknown minor worlds! Naturally, the Ji clan wished for such a secure base as well.

And Ning wasn’t lying when he had told them these things!

The three supremely ferocious formations also included a ‘sealing’ component; this sort of grand sealing formation couldn’t be broken through technique, they had to be destroyed through raw force! Unless one had the power of a True Immortal or Empyrean God, there was no way whatsoever to break through.

.....

A snowy white hound was standing in the sky. Behind him, a series of glistening, gem-like rocks appeared out of nowhere. There were a total of 108 such rocks.

The snowy white hound stared far away, towards the peak of a mountain.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Instantly, the stones hovering around him shot out like meteors, piercing deep into various parts of the mountain. Immediately afterwards...the mountain peak itself vanished,

and circles of blurry light began to manifest around the mountain peak with the appearance of clouds.

“The final formation-base of the ‘Eighteen Hypnotic Illusions’ has been established.” The snowy white hound let out a relieved sigh.

“Arise!”

As he activated the formation, every part of the Swallow Mountain region, including the mountain peaks, the rivers, the lakes, and the wildernesses all began to summon the elemental power of heaven and earth. At the same time, the various formation-bases began to resonate with each other, joining together into an enormous combination formation. Every single part of the formation came together in a marvelous, perfect manner.

Soon, the entire hundred thousand kilometer region of Swallow Mountain seemed to have been transformed into a truly hypnotic, illusory area. Unless one had a talisman issued by the Ji clan, anyone who entered would immediately become forever lost within.

Rumble...

Serpentwing Lake. Ordinary mosquitoes were flying about, and some would often fly into Brightheart Island.

In wild areas, mosquitoes were extremely common. However, these were very ordinary mosquitoes; they couldn’t even be considered monsters. Even Ning’s divine sense could find nothing strange about them at all. However...the core of this ‘Eighteen Hypnotic Illusions’ formation was Serpentwing Lake. After the formation was activated, although its core location of Serpentwing Lake appeared as ordinary as usual...there was now no way at all for these ordinary mosquitoes to fly towards Brightheart Island.

.....

An ordinary commandery city of the Grand Xia. Within an estate.

Swoosh.

A skinny man whose eyes glowed with green light suddenly appeared within the courtyard. In the courtyard, there was a black-robed man who was leisurely sipping tea. The man had long, unbound black hair, and in his forehead there was a vertical slit.

“Master,” the skinny man said respectfully.

“Mm?” The long-haired, black-robed man looked over. “What is it??”

“The entire Swallow Mountain region has become covered by a strange illusory formation. Even my little ones are completely unable to penetrate it; they have become completely lost within it, and they aren’t even able to return.” A hint of resentment was in the green, glowing eyes of the skinny man. Those mosquitoes were indeed extremely ordinary, but they were linked to his mind; this was no easy task!

“Oh?” The long-haired, black-robed man frowned. “An illusory formation? It seems as though Ji Ning has returned to Swallow Mountain to set down formations for it. It is fine; since the Ji clan wishes to establish Swallow Mountain as their foundation for flourishing, they will naturally need to maintain contact with the outside world. That means merchant caravans will be sent to and from it, and the Ji clan will guide them through the formations, ensuring them that they won’t be lost. You no longer have to worry about this matter any further; I will arrange for others to go keep a watch on things. Rest and build up your strength; I imagine that you won’t be able to recover your ‘little ones’.”

After all, even if someone else was sent into Swallow Mountain, they wouldn’t be able to recognize which of the mosquitoes were ‘special’.

“Alright,” the skinny man assented in a low voice, and then he departed.

The long-haired, black-robed man quickly began to give instructions a different subordinate. This seemingly ordinary commandery city of the Grand Xia was, in reality, one of the important bases for Bloodcloud Hall.

.....

Time flowed out.

Bloodcloud Hall used all sorts of tools to investigate. Mosquitoes,

merchant caravans, scrying arts...even possession arts! They began to use every method they had to infiltrate Swallow Mountain!

But as each of the great formations of the Whitewater Hound began to be erected, especially in the Serpentwing Lake region, it became rare for even the Ji clansmen to encounter Ji Ning. Only Ji Truekeep, Granny Shadow, and a few others could go directly to see him. Even the likes of Ji Mo and the others had to first request a meeting. Thus, it became extremely hard for even Bloodcloud Hall to determine whether or not Ji Ning was actually staying at Serpentwing Lake.

“Master.”

The same ordinary commandery city as before. A white-haired elder said in a lowered voice, “Swallow Mountain is now surrounded by layers of grand formations. One of my clones was accompanying a merchant caravan in investigating the place, and the number of formations that I’ve already uncovered is enough to cause even Celestial Immortals to become lost after entering it. One has to use a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal to flee the place. Now, it seems, Swallow Mountain is completely under Ji Ning’s control. Within this region, Ning can use the formations to his advantage; killing him there is extremely unlikely. Just investigating the various formations, especially the dangerous ones, is essentially suicide. I imagine a large number of Loose Immortals would have to die in the process.”

“Right.” The long-haired, black-robed man nodded. “Since even you feel this way, Elder Chu, then it seems Swallow Mountain truly is not an appropriate place for assassination. Then...let us wait. Wait for Ji Ning to leave Swallow Mountain.”

.....

The very same day in which Elder Chu was making a report to Bloodcloud Hall. The skies above Brightheart Island was filled with plumes of snow.

“After tirelessly working day and night for forty-nine days, I’ve finally set up the first of the three supremely lethal formations.” The white-

robed Uncle White let out a laugh, but his gaze was filled with exhaustion. “I really didn’t dare to be slightest bit careless. If I was even slightly careless, everything would’ve gone wrong, and most likely some of those ingredients would’ve been imploded and destroyed by elemental energy.”

“Sorry for the trouble, Uncle White.” Ning had an understanding of formations as well; he knew very well that even being able to merely set up these three supreme formations required one to have the ability of a grandmaster of formations. This was because even Ning felt his head grow dizzy when he simply looked at the arcane mysteries contained within the formations, to say nothing of actually laying them down.

“It wasn’t so bad. I’ve already set up one of the three supreme formations; the entire Swallow Mountain region is already stabilized. I can take it a bit slower for the other two,” Uncle White said with a smile.

As they were chatting.

“Ji Ning.” A voice rang out from far away.

Ning immediately arose and turned around; it was the voice of the clan leader, Ji Truekeep.

“Ji Ning, Immortal Fivecraze of the Black-White College has arrived.” Truekeep walked over, Immortal Fivecraze by his side.

“Big brother Fivecraze.” Ning immediately went forward to welcome him. Because he was now a Void-level Earth Immortal, according to the rules of the Black-White College, the two of them had to refer to each other as they would equals of the same generation.

“Ji Ning, your master has left his secluded meditation. He is preparing to undergo his Celestial Tribulation in nine days!” Immortal Fivecraze said solemnly.

“Nine days?!” Ning was instantly stunned.

Chapter 10: The Celestial Tribulation

“This is your master’s own decision,” Immortal Fivecraze said.

Ji Ning immediately understood. The Celestial Tribulation was the most important event a cultivator would encounter in his life; generally speaking, they would choose to attempt it at a time whispered to them by their subconscious. Since his master had chosen to attempt it nine days hence, then that meant that his master would have the greatest chance of success nine days from now.

But even though that would be the ‘greatest chance’...the chance was still comparatively slim. After all, the Grand Xia world had countless Void-level Earth Immortals, but often more than a million years would pass without a single Celestial immortal arising! Only in a time like this, when the Three Realms were in a state of upheaval, did the Grand Xia see multiple Earth Immortals overcome the tribulation during the past twenty, thirty years. But even then, only a few had succeeded. Spread out across 3600 commanderies and four seas...the chances were still extremely low!”

“Very few people know that your master is attempting the Celestial Tribulation nine days from now. You can’t tell anyone,” Immortal Fivecraze instructed.

“I understand.” Ning looked at the nearby Ji Truekeep. Truekeep nodded. “Don’t worry; I won’t tell anyone. Right...the two of you can chat in private.” Truekeep knew exactly how major a matter this was, and so he immediately departed.

Within the hall, only Ji Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and the Whitewater Hound were left.

“Your master is going to attempt the Celestial Tribulation, but his chances are less than one in ten thousand. The tribulation is simply too hard. Thus...we need to ensure that no one disturbs him,” Immortal Fivecraze said seriously. “That is why your master will definitely need protectors during his tribulation.”

“Protectors?” Ning nodded. “I will naturally serve as a guardian for my master.”

“I discussed this matter with your master already. This time, the only people protecting him shall be you and me; just the two of us,” Immortal Fivecraze said.

“Two?” Ning was surprised.

“Your master has gained new insights after perusing the Dao-repositories you brought back to the Black-White College. His power has advanced exquisitely!” Immortal Fivecraze said. “I have gained insights as well, and my power is comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for six or seven hundred thousand years. The other Loose Immortals of the Black-White College, by comparison, are a bit weaker.”

Ning nodded.

“Your Primaltwin was able to kill Loose Immortals all those years ago, when it was merely a peak Primal Daoist. Given your training speed, I imagine it must now be at the late Void-level; after thirty years, you are probably no weaker than me,” Immortal Fivecraze said with a laugh. “There’s no need to be modest at a time like this; the more powerful you are, the more confident your master will feel during his tribulation.”

Ning nodded. “I should...be no weaker than Immortal Northwalker was in the past!”

Immortal Fivecraze was instantly startled. It must be understood that the Immortal path grew increasingly difficult as one progressed through it, and that the chances of becoming a Celestial Immortal were extremely low. The chances of becoming a True Immortal or Empyrean God? That was even rare, even if one’s vision spanned the entirety of the Three Realms. Every single commandery had Loose Immortals at the five hundred thousand year power level, but there were very few in the entire Grand Xia Dynasty who were at the level of a million year old Loose Immortal. As for Loose Immortals who had lived for millions of years...it was rare for the entire Grand Xia Dynasty to have a single such person!

“You?” Immortal Fivecraze could hardly believe it.

“My child Ning has long ago mastered the full nine stances of the [Three-Foot Sword]. He’s even improved on it,” the nearby Whitewater Hound said.

“Excellent!” A look of wild joy appeared on Immortal Fivecraze’s face. He said jubilantly, “Wonderful, wonderful, absolutely wonderful! Ji Ning, in terms of sword-arts alone, you are probably the most powerful figure our Black-White College has ever seen!”

Immortal Fivecraze sighed in absolute amazement.

This Ji Ning who stood before him...

He himself was like a sword! Swords were objects that were used to charge forward, to cut with incomparable sharpness! Ji Ning was like a sword who chopped through all the bushes and thorns that lay in his path. Years ago, as a youth, he had become the champion of the entire Conclave of Immortal Destiny! After the past thirty-plus years...he had mastered and even perfected the [Three-Foot Sword] of Immortal Northwalker, customizing it for his own use!

What sort of talent was this? After a few more decades or a century, how powerful would he become?

“The sword is my body.”

“The sword is my life.”

“The sword is my path.”

Immortal Fivecraze nodded as he looked at Ning. “When every Sword Immortal embarks on the Dao of the Sword, they will understand their own sword-hearts and these principles. But understanding is easy; action is hard! There are very, very few who can truly reach this level, and in this vast world, countless Sword Immortals have fallen. I can sense, however, the towering sword-intent radiating from you, a sword-heart that is simply inconceivable. You truly were born to be a Sword Immortal.”

In truth, many years ago, the likes of Lu Dongbin had already felt certain that Ning was born to be a peerless Sword Immortal.

The reason for his current success was partially because of his experiences from his past life, but also because of his parents in this life.

His father had given him a sword.

His mother had given him a heart.

.....

After chatting for a short while, Ning asked, "Is master in a rush? If he isn't in a rush, I'll stay one more day here at Serpentwing Lake; I'll reunite with all of you at the Black-White College tomorrow."

"We are planning to leave the Black-White College in three days and head to the chosen tribulation area," Immortal Fivecraze said. "We have a day to spare. You can make your preparations here at Serpentwing Lake."

"What will be the tribulation area?" Ning couldn't help but ask.

"That is a secret for now," Immortal Fivecraze said. "Once your master's enemies learn of it, they will immediately head to that location to attempt to ruin your master's tribulation. Thus, the tribulation area is something which only your master knows at present. Even I don't know. After we head arrive there, we shall know."

Ning laughed. "That's for the best. If only master himself knows, there's no fear of it leaking."

"Alright. Make your preparations; I'm leaving now." Immortal Fivecraze left right away.

Within the hall.

Soon, Little Qing was called back by Ji Ning. Within the courtyard was Ji Ning, Uncle White, and Little Qing.

"Master is about to undergo his Celestial Tribulation. This matter is extremely important; we can't be reckless in preparing for it," Ning said with absolute solemnity. "That's why both I and Uncle White are leaving...and we'll leave Swallow Mountain in your hands, Little Qing."

The formations of Swallow Mountain were too numerous and too complicated.

Even those lower-class formations required experts who were at least at the Primal Daoist level to completely control them. But right now, aside from Ning, the most powerful members of the Ji clan were only at the Wanxiang stage! As for the supreme formations...just activating them would require the power of a Void-level Earth Immortal, but there was no way Ning would teach the secrets of these formations to the monsters of the Witchriver Immortal Estate.

“Actually, I really want to go as well. The Celestial Tribulation...I’ve never even...” Little Qing stopped midway through her words as Ning gave her a look.

“Master, I know what really matters,” Little Qing hurriedly said with a laugh.

“Uncle White, Little Qing...both of you, hurry up and raise your power to the late Void-level today,” Ning said. “These two jade bottles each contain 2.5 million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence.”

Ning trained in the [Darknorth Sutra], which allowed one to train all the way to the Daofather level, and yet his Primaltwin had only needed 2.5 million kilograms to go from the peak Primal stage to the late Void-level. Uncle White and Little Qing had both already reached the early Void-level; 2.5 million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence would be more than enough to let them reach the late Void-level.”

“Remember, don’t train to the peak of the Void-level, no matter what,” Ning warned.

“Don’t worry. We aren’t anywhere close to being prepared for the Celestial Tribulation.”

.....

While Uncle White and Little Qing trained, Ning’s true body entered the Still Room of the underwater estate. For the sake of his master’s tribulation, Ning was going to raise his power to the highest level possible as well! Fortunately, he had acquired 15 million kilograms at the main headquarters of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain; although he had spent some of it to purchase a few treasures, he still had more than ten

million kilograms left!

The handsome, delicate-looking fur-clad youth seated himself atop the netherwater jade bed.

In front of him was a tiny jade bottle.

“Begin.”

A torrent of liquefied elemental essence flooded out from the jade bottle, forming an awe-inspiring lake within the Still Room. Around Ning, a dark vortex appeared, and the limitless amount of essence began to disappear as it drew near the dark vortex, having been sucked into Ning’s Zifu Region.

Within the Zifu Region.

His golden lotus, after absorbing an enormous amount of essence, began to shudder and grow out from within that scorching sea of Primal Fire. The golden lotus was constantly growing taller, and both its petals and its stem began to quickly increase in thickness. The elemental ki within the golden lotus grew increasingly pure as well, so pure that it would cause one’s heart to tremble. At the same time, that adorable little lotus seedpod at the very top of the golden lotus began to slowly increase in size, and within the heart of the lotus seedpod, an unripe lotus seed took form.

“The late Void level!” Everything came to a halt.

The now-enormous golden lotus swayed within the Primal Fire that blazed atop the back of the continent-sized Turtle-Snake. This golden lotus was now the absolute most dazzling ‘location’ within the entire Zifu region.

Upon reaching the late Void level, the ‘Goldlotus Primal’ was already extremely powerful; it was just a hair away from complete perfection.

The next day.

Ning, Uncle White, and Little Qing gathered together for a meal. They had all increased in power to the late Void-level the previous night. After

the meal, Little Qing was left behind to protect Serpentwing Lake, while Ning led Uncle White towards the Black-White College.

.....

The Black-White College. Immortal Diancai's abode.

"Ji Ning, you came." The black-robed Immortal Diancai was seated in the lotus position atop a jade bed, a calm look on his face. "Sit."

Next to him was a prayer mat, seated atop which was Immortal Fivecraze.

Ning nodded, then sat down on another prayer mat while the Whitewater Hound lay down behind Ning.

"I heard senior apprentice-brother Fivecraze say that you've already mastered the complete nine stances of the [Three-Foot Sword], and that you have perfected it?" Immortal Diancai said with a laugh.

"Yes." Ning nodded.

Immortal Diancai smiled. "Good. With you having reached such a level in the sword...even if I fail my tribulation, I'll still feel satisfied."

"Master, how can you say such things?" Ning said frantically.

"I'm just making conversation. It seems you aren't even as calm about this as I am," Immortal Diancai said.

Ning was silent.

He was indeed nervous; after all, the chances of success were simply far, far too low. If his master were to fail...

Immortal Diancai, seeing this, simply laughed. He understood Ning's temperament very well; Ning was a passionate man who cared deeply about his feelings and his relationships! For the sake of his relationships, he could even give up his life! It was precisely because he had come to understand Ning's personality over their many years of knowing each other that Immortal Diancai felt so extremely fond of this disciple of his. That was why he treated him with such sincerity.

“This Whitewater Hound is coming as well?” Immortal Diancai asked.

Ning nodded. “Master, don’t underestimate Uncle White. He is extremely talented in formations, and when I went to study from my master, Uncle White learned some extremely profound formations as well; he can be described as a grandmaster of formations. I wouldn’t dare proclaim him as being the best in the entire Grand Xia Dynasty...but here within Stillwater Commandery at least, he would be one of the top two.”

“Oh?” Both Immortal Diancai and Immortal Fivecraze revealed looks of delight.

Anyone who dared refer to himself as a grandmaster of formations would definitely be an extraordinary person.

Ning laughed confidently. In terms of the Dao of Formations, Uncle White was indeed a grandmaster. In addition, however, Uncle White knew how to set up some extremely rare and exceedingly powerful formations, and so even other grandmasters of formations would lose to him in a competition of formations! That supremely ferocious formation that he had set up around Swallow Mountain, for example; most likely, there were extremely few people in the entire Grand Xia Dynasty who could set up such a powerful formation.

But of course, the Grand Xia Dynasty definitely had individuals who were superior to Uncle White in formations; for example, that formation surrounding the imperial palace of the Grand Xia was something that only a truly major power could set up! It was several levels higher in power than the formations around Swallow Mountain.

Chapter 11: Four Great Tribulations

“Since you’ve arrived, Ji Ning, that means we are all present. Let’s head out tonight to the tribulation area, then,” Immortal Diancai said.

Ning and Immortal Fivecraze exchanged a glance, then both nodded. “Fine. We’ll head out tonight.”

This tribulation had to be kept top-secret. Ning and the others didn’t dare be even the slightest bit careless. Even during a normal situation, one would have to be extremely careful in attempting the Celestial Tribulation, but given that the Three Realms were currently in a state of chaos...Ning and the others naturally had to be even more careful than normal.

Late night.

Immortal Diancai, Immortal Fivecraze, Ji Ning, and the Whitewater Hound stealthily used a spatial teleport to depart from Stillwater City.

.....

In the air above an awe-inspiringly vast sea, a spatial ripple suddenly appeared. Three human figures accompanied by a large, snowy white hound appeared from within the ripple.

“Where are we?” Ning looked at the surrounding area. Because it had been his master, Immortal Diancai, who had used the spatial teleport, not even Ning knew where they were exactly.

“The great Darknorth Sea,” Immortal Diancai said. “The location that I’ve chosen for my tribulation is a minor world which I discovered by accident when I was adventuring through the Darknorth Sea as a child. This minor world was extremely well-hidden, and it is extremely well-suited for attempting the tribulation. Follow me!”

Clouds instantly appeared around them as Immortal Diancai used a technique to lead Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and the Whitewater Hound in quickly flying forward. Soon, an island appeared in the distance. The island was scorchingly hot, as there was a live volcano atop it.

“The entrance to that minor world is within the volcano on that island.” Immortal Diancai led the group to fly into the air above the island, then charged straight into the mouth of the volcano.

The region within the volcano was extremely strange. A large amount of lava was bubbling and frothing about.

Immortal Diancai quietly glanced at one corner of it, a complicated look in his eyes. He said softly, “In my youth, I was young and arrogant; I roamed the world in a fearless, untamed manner. And now, I am about to attempt my tribulation...life truly is a marvelous, strange thing.”

Ning and Immortal Fivecraze could both sense that Immortal Diancai’s mood seemed rather off.

“For this tribulation...if I fail, I shall die!” Immortal Diancai said softly. “If I die...then I’ll reunite with you, junior apprentice-sister.”

Deep within his memory...

There was a young, carefree, brilliant genius youth; Immortal Diancai, the number one peerless genius of his generation within the Black-White College.

With him was a reincarnated Immortal maiden who was known as Fairy Drizzlerain, and who had countless admirers and pursuers.

They adventured together, shoulder-to-shoulder, experiencing life-and-death events together. They had roamed through countless places, entering mountain ranges and passing through seas. And then, one day, they had encountered an ancient Primal-level Fiendgod of fire. The ancient Fiendgod had emerged from within the lava...and their parting on that day truly became an eternal one. The flames of the Fiendgod caused his junior apprentice-sister’s soul to be shattered...

“Master.” Ning was shocked. His master was actually planning to die if he failed?

It must be understood that the Celestial Tribulation was extremely dangerous; even the Goldlotus Primal would be heavily wounded. Some would realize halfway through the tribulation that they wouldn’t be able

to succeed, and so they would give up, choosing to become a Loose Immortal. Because the amount of damage sustained by each person's Goldlotus Primal was different, the purity of the elemental ki would vary amongst Loose Immortals. Formidable ones were comparable to peak Void-level Earth Immortals, while weaker ones might only have elemental ki comparable to early-stage Void-level Earth Immortals.

Some Earth Immortals, however, would go welcome the tribulation with the intent of rather dying to it than giving up!

This did indeed give someone a significantly higher chance of overcoming the Celestial Tribulation. But at the very end, if they failed... then their souls would be shattered!

"You still haven't forgotten." Immortal Fivecraze shook his head.

"Forget? Why should I forget? How could I bear to forget?" Immortal Diancai replied softly.

Ning said, "Master, leave yourself a sliver of a chance, so that you can have a chance at reincarnation. If you fail in this life, you might succeed in the next one."

"No need to try and dissuade me." Immortal Diancai shook his head. "My decision is made. Let's go. Let's go inside."

Whoosh!

The lava below them suddenly parted as Immortal Diancai led them deeper downwards. At the very deepest part, a winding tunnel suddenly appeared. Immortal Diancai led them through the tunnel in an extremely familiar manner, and a dark cave soon appeared before them.

"Go in." Immortal Diancai led Ji Ning and the others to fly into the black cave.

.....

This was a world that was filled with an infinite aura of death. Even the mountains had turned black, while the earth itself was a sickly yellow. Not a single hint of green could be seen, and no ordinary grass lived here.

This world only had a strange type of vegetation that was pitch-black and covered by spikes.

Whoosh...

The side of a large mountain began to ripple and shake. Immortal Diancai, Immortal Fivecraze, Ji Ning, and the Whitewater Hound flew out from within it.

“Such a strong aura of death?” Immortal Fivecraze frowned as he stared at the surrounding area. “What happened to this minor world? Logically speaking, even if it suffered some sort of disaster, given the power of the Solar Star and the Lunar Star, it should have eventually recovered.”

“This was a world where a Fiendgod of fire hid within,” Immortal Diancai said. “The Fiendgod caused this minor world to become completely filled with lava, causing all the living creatures within it to perish. Although that Fiendgod is now dead, for this minor world to recover...a very long period of time will be needed.”

Ning nodded.

It was easy to ruin a minor world, but in order for it to recover, a million years would be needed or perhaps even longer. Only then would new vegetation arise and new creatures and birds be born.

“This minor world is extremely well-hidden, and it has no living creatures; I don’t have to worry about any ordinary life-forms being killed as collateral damage. It is very well-suited for my tribulation attempt,” Immortal Diancai said. “In a normal situation...chances of being discovered while undergoing a tribulation in such a well-hidden place should be very low. However, now that the entire Grand Xia world is in a state of chaos...I’ve heard that quite a few Void-level Earth Immortals have suffered attacks during their tribulations of late.”

“Right. All Void-level Earth Immortals choose extremely well-hidden places for their tribulations...but they were still discovered and assaulted,” Immortal Fivecraze agreed somberly. “We have to be careful.”

“Don’t worry, Master. Leave everything to me and big brother

Fivecraze,” Ning promised solemnly.

“Alright.” Immortal Diancai nodded, then began to fly far away. Ji Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and Uncle White hurriedly flew after him.

After flying for a period of time.

Immortal Diancai descended upon a wide area that had been completely scorched black. He then sat down in the lotus position...and began to wait quietly.

“After eight days, the Celestial Tribulation shall descend. Everything will be up to your master, then.” Immortal Fivecraze was worried.

“He will have to rely on himself.” Ning was worried, too.

When the Celestial Tribulation descended, all outside sources of help were forbidden.

Even Daofathers of the Great Firmament wouldn't dare to intervene and assist others in their tribulations. If anyone tried to help someone else defeat a Celestial Tribulation...then the tribulation would instantly unleash a divine punishment upon the offender, even if the offender was a Daofather. If the Daofather immediately stopped, that was one thing, but if he tried to continue and resist...even the Daofather would be annihilated by the divine punishment!

Thus, from ancient days till now, no one ever dared to help someone else resist a Celestial Tribulation.

In addition...

Even setting up formations was considered ‘outside help’. If Immortal Diancai himself had been the one to set up the formations, that wouldn't be as much of an issue! At most, the formation would be destroyed and the power of the Celestial Tribulation would be increased. But if someone else, such as Uncle White or Ji Ning, was in control of the formation...then the two of them would suffer divine punishment!

This was the reason why Ning hadn't invited his master to go to Swallow Mountain for the tribulation.

There were far too many places in the world with extremely formidable formations. The headquarters of powerful sects all contained exceedingly mighty formations; for example, the formation within the imperial citadel of the Grand Xia was something which a major power had set up. If a Void-level Earth Immortal could temporarily borrow the strength of a formation to fight the Celestial Tribulation, then overcoming it would become far too simple!

Thus...

All sources of outside help were completely forbidden! The Celestial Tribulation was the test which all Immortal cultivators faced on their Immortal path! Even experts in the Dao of Formations such as Uncle White would only be permitted to use magic treasure formations, such as the Fuxi Staff Formation. When the Celestial Tribulation truly descended, they would be allowed to use the Fuxi Staff Formation to defend against it.

The [Heavenraker] and the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] were all considered types of sword-formations.

However, formations that were locked onto one location and which were set up using precious ingredients were considered outside sources of help! [Heavenraker], the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation], and the Fuxi Staff Formation, however, were all considered part of one's own strength.

"Master." Ning suddenly walked over.

"Yes?" Immortal Diancai raised his head to look towards Ji Ning.

"Master, I have five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords. If you use them, your chances of overcoming the Celestial Tribulation shall be greater." Ning willed it, and five pitch-black Immortal swords suddenly appeared out of nowhere to hover next to him. These were the Heavenraker Immortal swords. Ning had already dispersed his elemental ki from within them; they had become ownerless items now.

Immortal Diancai was stunned. "Five top-grade Immortal ranked swords?"

“Top-grade Immortal-ranked...and five of them?” Immortal Fivecraze revealed a look of crazed joy as well. “Wonderful! Ji Ning, you truly have been hiding some incredible secrets.”

Ning laughed.

Items at the level of a top-grade Immortal-ranked flying sword could no longer simply be purchased; they had to be traded for! Five such swords, and all from the same source...they were far more valuable than the combined value of all of the Immortal swords Ning had acquired from killing the monster kings and that vile Patriarch. These were items from the underwater estate’s Treasure Hall; they were naturally exceptional!

“Take them,” Immortal Fivecraze said with a chortle. “Your disciple is telling you to use them; are you going to be wishy-washy about it?”

“Fine.” Immortal Diancai’s aura instantly changed. “With these five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, my chances of overcoming the Celestial Tribulation shall be much greater...at least for the first three tribulations.”

The Celestial Tribulation was divided into a total of four great tribulations.

They were the wind tribulation, the fire tribulation, the thunder tribulation, and the demonheart tribulation!

The first three could be blocked, but they would grow increasingly powerful and terrifying; the vast majority of Void-level Earth Immortals would perish over the course of the first three tribulations. The thunder tribulation in particular...bolts of divine lightning would crash down, completely disintegrating the bodies of many Void-level Earth Immortals. The Goldlotus Primal would be heavily injured by the slamming thunderbolts, and many were so terrified that they would give up and flee, becoming Loose Immortals. In the past, Immortal Juhua had also failed during the thunder tribulation...and it was because he didn’t have any good Immortal-ranked magic treasures!

If he had top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures, given Immortal Juhua’s power and Dao-heart, he might’ve become a Celestial Immortal.

“Right. Your chances are now much greater...but you still need to be careful. The Celestial Tribulation...magic treasures are only one part of your power. When iron is being forged, it has to rely on its own innate hardness. The Celestial Tribulation primarily tests one’s personal power,” Immortal Fivecraze said seriously.

“I understand.” Immortal Diancai nodded.

Even many disciples of True Immortals or Empyrean Gods would fail during their tribulation. Generally speaking, disciples of True Immortals or Empyrean Gods all had top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures, and yet many still failed. Clearly, the Celestial Tribulation was different for each person! The more monstrously talented someone was, the more powerful one was, the more ridiculously terrifying the Celestial Tribulation would be.

.....

One day after another went by

Immortal Diancai familiarized himself with the Heavenraker swords, then began to wait quietly. Ji Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and the Whitewater Hound also quietly stood to one side, standing guard for him.

And finally...

Whoosh...

Suddenly, a gentle wind began to blow, rustling Immortal Diancai’s Daoist robes.

Immortal Diancai opened his eyes. “Senior apprentice-brother Fivecraze, Ji Ning, brother White...stand guard for me. My Celestial Tribulation has begun.”

Ning and the others could sense that the nearby wind was beginning to slowly grow increasingly fierce. They couldn’t help but nervously look towards the seated Immortal Diancai.

Chapter 12: Celestial Immortal Body

Whoosh...

The wild wind that had suddenly arose in this world of death came from every direction. All the winds surged towards Immortal Diancai's direction, and Ji Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and the Whitewater Hound could all sense how powerful this wind was. However, they were able to resist it by using just a bit of elemental ki.

The closer the wind moved towards Immortal Diancai, the more powerful it became. The wind gathered from all corners of the world, slowly merging into an azure windblade. By the time this azure windblade actually flew towards Immortal Diancai, it had turned such a deep azure color that it could almost be described as a black windblade.

Just staring at it caused Ning and the others to feel shocked.

"Open."

The black-robed Immortal Diancai stood there, the five Heavenraker Immortal swords floating around him, swiveling. It was as though five rainbows were swirling around him. Although the terrifyingly powerful black windblades chopped repeatedly towards him, all the strikes were blocked.

"Junior apprentice-brother Diancai's sword-arts have already risen to such a level?" Immortal Fivecraze revealed a look of delight. "Ji Ning, I had an idea as to what level your master's sword-arts had reached...but he is even more powerful than I had expected! Long ago, I came to the conclusion that junior apprentice-brother Diancai had the highest chance amongst us of becoming a Celestial Immortal, and back then his sword-arts were already at an astonishing level. After adventuring for forty years, and after receiving your Dao-repository, his sword-arts...they are not one whit inferior to Immortal Northwalker's. He truly does have a chance to become a Celestial Immortal!"

"Right." Ning was filled with eagerness as well.

Everything else aside, the 'Five Elements Sword-Intent' which his master had just displayed was enough to let Ning know that his master's sword-arts were most likely on a level comparable to his own. His master truly lived up to his reputation as the peerless genius of the Black-White College with the highest chances of becoming a Celestial Immortal.

.....

The savage black windblades hammered repeatedly against the five rainbows of light, causing even the surrounding space to crack and fracture.

Rumble...

All of the black windblades suddenly vanished. The world actually turned completely calm and tranquil again...but then yet another series of winds began to appear. The winds stabbed like sharp needles...and a series of needle-like spikes began to appear in midair. The thousands of spikes all gleamed with golden light as they stabbed towards the five Immortal swords which were in the form of five rainbows of light.

.....

Savage. Insidious. Soft. Icy. Blazing...

All sorts of wind came in an unending flow. In fact, a total of twelve types of skywind appeared as well!

Suddenly, the surrounding area once more turned calm. For a long period of time, no further gusts of wind appeared.

"Not good." Immortal Fivecraze was startled. "The final part of the wind tribulation has begun."

Ning was nervous and restless as well. He looked anxiously towards his master, standing there in the distance.

The Celestial Tribulation consisted of four great tribulations; the wind tribulation, the fire tribulation, the thunder tribulation, and the demonheart tribulation. The wind tribulation...it first consisted of ordinary wind, then types of skywind of different power, and then finally

the most terrifying of all, the Celestial Immortal Wind. This Celestial Immortal Wind was invisible and formless; it was hard to locate within the Three Realms, and would only appear during the Celestial Tribulation.

No magic treasures were capable of blocking the Celestial Immortal Wind; it would form directly in front of the tribulant's body, then surge in through the head. Nothing, not even Daoist robes, would be able to block the penetrating power of this wind in the slightest!

After surging in through the head, it would naturally disperse and tear through the vital organs.

What it tested was a person's Dao-heart. If one's Dao-heart was weak, then once the Celestial Immortal Wind surged in through the head, their body would most likely instantly melt and transform into dust, allowing only the Goldlotus Primal to survive and flee. More than 99% of Void-level Earth Immortals would be defeated by the Celestial Immortal Wind.

If one's Dao-heart was strong and stable enough, then the trial of the Celestial Immortal Wind would actually be a transformatative baptism, allowing the tribulant to slowly begin to develop a Celestial Immortal Body.

"Master, you have to hold on," Ning said, extremely worried.

"Hold on." Immortal Fivecraze stared at him as well.

Immortal Diancai stood there by himself, surrounded by those five pitch-black Immortal swords. He opened his eyes, revealing a smile as he looked towards Ning and Immortal Fivecraze. "The wind tribulation is over."

"Good." Immortal Fivecraze laughed loudly, "I just knew that your Dao-heart had to be strong, junior apprentice-brother! The wind tribulation was unable to do anything to you at all. Hurry up and replenish your elemental ki and prepare for the next tribulation, the fire tribulation!"

Ning let out a sigh of relief as well.

At least the first tribulation had been overcome.

In truth, given the Dao-heart which his master normally displayed, Ning should have felt quite confident in him. However, right before they entered this minor world, his master's emotions had been disturbed, and he had even spoken of reuniting with his deceased junior apprentice-sister. Ning had been very worried about the effects of this former relationship on his master's heart. Once one's Dao-heart became even slightly unstable, then one's body would quickly be transformed into dust.

The Celestial Tribulation was truly dangerous. One couldn't make a single error in it; a single error would represent a complete failure!

.....

Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and Uncle White kept their divine senses spread as they stood vigilant guard for Immortal Diancai, whom they continued to watch.

Roughly an hour after the wind tribulation ended.

Rumbling red clouds suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the skies; it was as though a cloud created from an enormous ball of flames had appeared.

"The fire tribulation has arrived." Ning and Immortal Fivecraze both watched nervously.

The fire tribulation wasn't as insidious as the wind tribulation, but it was even more savage and ferocious! The power of those flames...if a Void-level Earth Immortal slipped for a single instant, then his body would instantly be charred into ash.

The fiery clouds in the skies slowly descended. Instantly, the temperature of the surrounding area began to rise, and the air itself seemed to glow with a blurry red light.

Crackle crackle crackle...

The ground itself began to turn soft. It began to transform into lava and began to bubble and froth.

Immortal Diancai began to levitate into the air. "Go!" Immortal Diancai

pointed with his finger, and one of the five Heavenraker swords actually flew out, transforming into a giant serpent of fire that flew through the skies, stabbing straight towards the enormous fiery cloud, slashing through it and causing it to grow chaotic and disordered. However, the Heavenraker sword was quickly knocked flying backwards.

Instantly, the fiery cloud began to drop at an even faster pace. Soon, it completely enveloped Immortal Diancai within it.

Hiss hiss hiss...

The temperature had risen to a terrifying level, and even the lava within the region had been completely incinerated and transformed into nothingness. Even the stones in the distant region where Ning and the others were watching had been transformed into lava. From this, one could tell how terrifying the temperature was.

Rumble...whoosh...crackle...

Streaks of skyfire could vaguely be seen blazing from within the fiery cloud. There was golden skyfire, black skyfire, green skyfire, and even skyfire that seemed to flash like the stars...

"The various types of skyfire have descended." Ning and Immortal Fivecraze both watched nervously.

Boom!

Suddenly...

The entire fiery cloud began to converge and coalesce around a single central point. Suddenly, a human-shaped figure appeared from within it, protected by five Immortal swords. The fiery cloud had transformed into a blazing light that was completely insubstantial. The light passed through the blocking Immortal swords, flying straight into the human-shaped figure's body.

For a moment, the entire world turned silent. The surrounding temperature began to drop at a rapid pace. Immortal Diancai, however, emanated a fiery light as he hovered there in the skies. Ning stared at his master; his master was emanating so much fiery light, he seemed to be

made out of flames himself.

“The final type of fire within the fire tribulation...the Celestial Immortal Fire,” Immortal Fivecraze said worriedly.

A Celestial Immortal Body had to be tempered by wind, fire, and lightning. Only afterwards could the Celestial Immortal Body be forged. Then, after undergoing the trial of the demonheart tribulation, the Celestial Immortal’s Dao-heart would be formed.

Only after all tribulations were passed would one become a carefree, unbound Celestial Immortal!

“He overcame it.” The distant Ning revealed a look of joy on his face. He saw that the distant Immortal Diancai’s body was beginning to slowly turn a duller color as he slowly returned to normal.

Immortal Diancai landed. He immediately sat down in the lotus position, quietly adjusting his energy levels and recovering his elemental ki.

“The fire tribulation is over. Next comes the most dangerous tribulation, the thunder tribulation!” Immortal Fivecraze murmured softly.

“Right. The thunder tribulation.” Ning’s heart clenched as well.

Of the four great tribulations, the final demonheart tribulation was the strangest tribulation. But the thunder tribulation was the most terrifying one!

The thunder tribulation was the most brutal one of all. Layers of lightning bolts would descend, continuously rising in power. Even past figures like Immortal Juhua and Immortal Northwalker had eventually been destroyed by the power of the continuous, unending thunderbolts, resulting in their Goldlotus Primals being damaged and them fleeing to become Loose Immortals. The thunder tribulation was an absolute nightmare! The vast majority of peerless geniuses would end up perishing in the face of this tribulation. There were absolutely no tricks that could be used to block the thunderbolts; each time a bolt descended, you had to block it head-on. If you couldn’t? You’d be finished!

Simple as that!

“I wonder how many bolts of thunder will fall.” Immortal Fivecraze was worried.

“Master has an extremely high level in sword-arts. His talent is very high, and he has five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords. I imagine there will be quite a few,” Ning said worriedly as well.

The thunder tribulation...some Earth Immortals might only encounter nine bolts of thunder. Others, however, might meet with eighteen, twenty seven, or thirty six bolts...and according to the stories, the highest number possible was eighty-one bolts!

The power of the skythunder would be linked to many factors; in fact, it was also linked to karmic merit. Still, generally speaking, Ki Refiners would never suffer the legendary ‘eighty-one bolt skythunder tribulation!’ Generally speaking, only Fiendgod Body Refiners would encounter it while undergoing their tribulation. Many monstrously powerful Void-level Fiendgod Body Refiners would be hammered to death by the consecutive lightning bolts!

Ning knew very well that although he had already trained in the third stage of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], if he were to encounter the eighty-one bolts of lightning, he would definitely be crushed into nothingness by the power of those bolts!

“I hope he has less than 36 bolts,” Immortal Fivecraze whispered.

“Right.” Ning nodded gently as well.

Ki Refiners were innately weaker than Fiendgod Body Refiners when it came to withstanding skythunder. Generally speaking, it would be very hard for them to succeed if there were more than 36 bolts.

.....

Another hour passed.

Two enormous stormclouds suddenly appeared out of nowhere from within the calm skies. These two stormclouds converged rapidly from

different directions, completely blotting out the sun as they drew close to each other. Instantly, electric streaks of lightning began to crackle between the two massive clouds. The awe-inspiring power from within them caused Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and the Whitewater Hound to all feel trepidation.

Slowly, the two massive stormclouds began to merge, and as they combined to form a single supermassive stormcloud, the supermassive stormcloud began to rotate. Soon, it the thunder tribulation stormcloud had transformed into a vortex of lightning and clouds.

“What an enormous thunder tribulation cloud.” Immortal Fivecraze’s face suddenly changed.

“What’s wrong?” Ning asked, worried.

“When I faced my tribulation, it was this thunder tribulation which defeated me. But...the thunder tribulation cloud I faced wasn’t this big,” Immortal Fivecraze said worriedly.

“What?! How many bolts of thunder were you up against during your thunder tribulation?” Ning asked.

“I don’t know. However, the twenty-fifth bolt of skythunder shattered my magic treasures and blew apart my body. I thus chose to give up and flee,” Immortal Fivecraze said. “Junior apprentice-brother Diancai will definitely face far more bolts of skythunder than I did.”

Just as his words came out...

BOOM!

Ning could hear a thunderous noise in his ears as an absolutely dazzling bolt of lightning suddenly streaked down from the lightning-cloud vortex in the skies, slamming directly downwards towards Immortal Diancai.

Chapter 13: My Master

Immortal Diancai stood there on the ground. His head raised, he stared at the lightning-cloud vortex, those five pitch-black Heavenraker swords swirling around him. When that first bolt of skythunder fell down from the skies...

“Go!” Immortal Diancai pointed. Instantly, one of the five Heavenraker swords shot out. It seemed to have transformed into an enormous mountain peak, carrying incomparable weight and power behind it as it went forth to welcome the bolt of lightning.

BOOM!

An enormous collision sound. The Heavenraker Immortal sword, as stable as a mountain, just trembled for a moment, whereas the bolt of skythunder was completely dispersed.

“The first bolt of skythunder is the weakest; even the most ordinary of Void-level Earth Immortals can withstand it. Given junior apprentice-brother Diancai’s power and the fact that he has five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords...he will probably only begin to find it taxing when he reaches the twenty-seventh bolt of skythunder,” Immortal Fivecraze said.

“Mm.” Ning nodded in agreement. Immortal Fivecraze had been defeated by the twenty-fifth bolt; if he had top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords back then, he probably would’ve been able to make it past the twenty-seventh as well.

Skythunder...every nine bolts represented a different level of power.

The first nine bolts were weak. Eighteen bolts were stronger. But twenty-seven bolts, thirty-six bolts...every nine bolts represented an increase in lethality. The legendary eighty-one bolts of skythunder...even the thought of them was enough to terrify.

BOOM! BOOM!

Skythunder exploded forth with wild fury. One bolt after another came

crashing down. Immortal Diancai was able to use a single one of his top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords to block all of the first eighteen bolts, causing a hint of joy to appear on his face. Although he knew in theory how powerful these swords were, only now did he truly understand how tremendously helpful these top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords were during the terrifying thunder tribulation!

BOOM! The nineteenth bolt of thunder was more savage than the last, and it came down even faster. It seemed to carry annihilating power within it; it was clearly on a higher level of power than the previous bolts.

That single Heavenraker sword once more flew up to greet it, still as stable and weighty as a mountain.

BANG!

The illusory mountain around the Heavenraker sword collapsed, and the sword itself was knocked downwards. The remaining force of the skythunder continued to crash down towards Immortal Diancai, but Immortal Diancai didn't panic in the slightest. He just let out a low growl, and instantly three of the four remaining Immortal swords around him flew upwards, glowing with golden light, watery light, and earthen light.

The three Heavenraker swords formed into a tripartite formation, effortlessly blocking the remaining power of the skythunder.

"Your master has only used his Tripartite Sword Formation," Immortal Fivecraze said. "Your master was exceedingly gifted, and many years ago he reached the Dao Realm level in three mastered Dao-Paths. He's also embarked on the path of a Sword Immortal. He originally only used three Immortal swords, and the technique he used the most often was this Tripartite Sword Formation. However, after training for so many more years, he's gained even more insights and has thus developed the Five Elements Sword."

Ning nodded slightly. Indeed. After his master switched to using three Immortal swords, his power seemed to increase dramatically. He was able to withstand one bolt of lightning after another, even overcoming the twenty-fifth bolt which had done in Immortal Fivecraze. He was able to

persist all the way through the twenty-seventh bolt.

“It’s time for another increase in power,” Immortal Fivecraze said with concern.

Twenty-seven bolts...this represented the end of the first three nine-sets.

Thirty-six would represent the end of the fourth nine-set!

As the twenty-eighth bolt came crashing down, the Tripartite Sword Formation was suddenly pressed downwards...but it was still able to withstand the bolt. But then came the twenty-ninth, the thirtieth bolts... the power of the skythunder was slowly increasing, and the Tripartite Sword Formation was beginning to crumble. By the time of the thirty-sixth bolt of skythunder, Immortal Diancai let out a low growl. Instantly, all five of the Heavenraker swords flew upwards to welcome this bolt.

Rumble...

As the five Heavenraker swords flew upwards, they formed into the illusion of five massive mountains in the sky, each of a different color. The five Immortal swords combined their power, becoming incomparably weighty and solid as they effortlessly deflected the thirty-sixth bolt of skythunder as well.

“Fine treasures. A fine sword-art!” Immortal Fivecraze said excitedly.

“Even the thirty-sixth bolt was blocked.” Ning revealed a look of excitement as well...but immediately afterwards, his face changed. This was because an even more terrifyingly powerful bolt of lightning was beginning to descend from the vortex of lightning.

“What?! Can it be that your master’s tribulation involves forty-five bolts?!” Immortal Fivecraze felt shocked.

Ning’s face turned solemn as well. Ki Refiners couldn’t be the slightest bit overconfident in facing their tribulations...because even a tiny unblocked fraction of the thunderbolt would be enough to completely blow apart their bodies! Fiendgod Body Refiners, by contrast, would generally be able to use their bodies to withstand a small amount of remnant power from the thunderbolts.

Thus...for many, thirty-six thunderbolts represented a plateau, the conclusion of the fourth nine-set. Ki Refiners generally had a chance to survive the first four sets...but after that, chances would grow dim!

.....

The thirty-seventh bolt of skythunder was clearly far more powerful than the previous bolt. Ning could sense the invisible pressure and power of the bolt just by looking at it. The power of this bolt of skythunder was at the level of a Celestial Immortal already!

Rumble...

From within the five enormous illusory mountains, the five Immortal swords managed to block this bolt of skythunder, but they were pushed down strongly in the process.

“Such power.” Immortal Diancai’s face changed as well, but his expression remained cold and his gaze remained resolute.

He wasn’t going to retreat or flee!

BOOM!

The thirty-eighth bolt of skythunder came crashing down, and Immortal Diancai once more used his five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords to greet the attack, managing to force it aside once more. But this time, the five illusory mountains that represented the five swords were nearly destroyed.

“Not good.” Watching from the distance, Immortal Fivecraze’s face changed dramatically. “It’s very hard to say as to whether or not your master will be able to overcome the forty-fifth bolt of skythunder.”

Ning didn’t say anything; he just watched closely. He could tell this as well!

Given that even the thirty-eighth bolt was already almost powerful enough to cause his master’s sword-arts to crumble...it was very hard to say if his master would be able to make it all the way past the forty-fifth. In the past, Immortal Fivecraze had succumbed to the twenty-fifth bolt,

rather than the twenty-seventh bolt.

BOOM!

The lightning-cloud vortex in the skies spat out the thirty-ninth bolt of skythunder, even more ferocious than the previous bolts.

“BLOCK!” Immortal Diancai let out a howl. The five Heavenraker swords were like fish that were swimming against the flow of the river. They carried those five illusory mountains to greet the bolt of skythunder, but when the skythunder came hammering down, all five swords were knocked downwards towards the ground. Still...the bolt of skythunder was almost consumed as well.

“Not enough!” Immortal Fivecraze said frantically.

“Master, Master!” Ning was panicking as well.

“I have to hold.” Immortal Diancai’s face suddenly turned a swollen red color, and his aura increased explosively in power as well. Clearly, he had just used a forbidden technique.

Immortal Fivecraze’s eyes were filled with nervousness. “Your master has used a forbidden technique to compress and squeeze more power out of his Goldlotus Primal. I hope that this technique will be enough to help him withstand the tribulation. It has to be enough. Don’t fail. You can’t fail!” He had seen far too many of his fellow disciples fail during the Celestial Tribulation. He had failed. His master had failed. His brothers had failed...

One after another had been toppled by the Celestial Tribulation.

Immortal Diancai was the most promising one he had seen, and he even had the aid of five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords.

“You have to hold,” Immortal Fivecraze murmured.

“Master...Master...” Ning’s heart was tight as well. He felt even more nervous than when he himself was facing life-and-death. Although he had heard long ago that the Celestial Tribulation was truly frightening, upon seeing the actual bolts of increasingly powerful skythunder come

crashing down from the skies, Ning became terrified that one of them would actually strike his master's body! A single strike...that would be it. He would be finished!

.....

The fortieth bolt. The forty-first bolt. The forty-second bolt...

After using the forbidden technique, the power of Immortal Diancai's five swords increased dramatically, and they took on multiple bolts in succession.

BOOM!

The forty-fourth bolt of skythunder!

Immortal Diancai's face was somewhat distorted now, and his eyes were filled with madness. The five Immortal swords once more flew upwards to greet the thunder, and the imposing illusion of the five mountains seemed mighty enough to suppress and seal away this entire minor world. But in the face of the all-annihilating bolt of skythunder...the five illusory mountains were dissipated, and all five Immortal swords were knocked flying backwards.

"He blocked it. Just the last one; the final bolt of skythunder," Immortal Fivecraze said worriedly.

"Master..." Ning was so frantic, he wanted to charge forward himself to help.

Blood was beginning to appear on the skin of Immortal Diancai's face. This forbidden technique was drawing out elemental ki in such a berserk, forcible way that even blood was being drawn out.

BOOM!

The forty-fifth bolt!

"Block it again!" Immortal Diancai seemed to have entered a berserk state, and all five Heavenraker swords frantically rose. It seemed as though, in this dire situation, he was able to unleash more power than he ever had before, and the five illusory mountains once more joined

together, increasing their power by a little bit compared to the past.

BANG!!!

The bolt of skythunder, representing annihilation, came crashing downwards.

Slash...

The five Immortal swords were knocked backwards, and a small amount of remaining power from the skythunder came crashing down towards Immortal Diancai as well.

“NO!” Ning felt as though his heart was about to split apart. He was so frantic, his eyes turned completely red.

“NO!” Immortal Fivecraze was filled with terror as well.

But Immortal Diancai actually let out an utterly berserk howl as five more Immortal swords suddenly appeared above him. These were the five swords which Immortal Diancai himself had been previously using! He had often used these five swords...and he only had enough time to transform them into five streaks of rainbow light before the remaining power of the lightning crashed down into them.

BANG! The five flying swords were all knocked flying, with one of them actually stabbing through Immortal Diancai’s chest, cutting out a bloody hole. However, the remaining power of the lightning had been completely dispersed.

“Hahaha, hahahaha...” Immortal Diancai began to laugh. Clutching the wound over his chest, he raised his head to the heavens and laughed.

Ning and Immortal Fivecraze were stunned for a moment...but in the next moment, they went berserk with joy.

“He blocked it!”

“Master blocked it!”

This sort of feeling, of victory snatched from the jaws of defeat, caused both Ning and Immortal Fivecraze’s emotions to go through a series of turbulent changes.

“But why...” Immortal Fivecraze raised his head, staring at the lightning-cloud vortex. His eyes suddenly became filled with despair and terror. “Why...why hasn’t...”

“Why hasn’t...hasn’t it dispersed?” Ning could feel a cold feeling sweeping through him from head to toe.

The vortex of lightning in the skies was continuing to swivel...and it was gathering an even more terrifying amount of power.

Immortal Diancai, still clutching his chest, was suddenly stunned. He stared blankly at the lightning-cloud vortex in the skies, his eyes filled with rage and despair. He unleashed a savage roar from his soul: “Why, why, WHY ARE THERE STILL MORE?!”

“Six nine-sets...six nine-sets...” Immortal Fivecraze’s eyes were filled with despair. “Six nine-sets of thunder. My junior apprentice-brother isn’t the disciple of a Daofather; he’s not even the disciple of a Celestial Immortal. Why would the sixth nine-set appear...why...”

“F*CK YOU, HEAVENS!” Ning raised his head as well, letting out a grief-stricken, enraged roar. Two streaks of tears began to fall from his eyes. “Master, master...my master!!!!”

BOOM!

Another enormous bolt of lightning was born from within the lightning-cloud vortex...and it came crashing downwards.

Chapter 14: Extermination

Ji Ning felt as though his heart was being torn apart. This pain filled every part of his body. Ever since his parents had passed away, he truly had very few kinsmen. Although his master Diancai always had a strict look and a cold face, Ning could sense the love and caring his master felt for him from deep within his heart. His master had the exact same sort of disposition which Ning's own father, Ji Yichuan, had.

"No. No..." Ning's heart was filled with nothing but despair.

Nobody could rescue his master from the Celestial Tribulation! Even a Daofather of the Great Firmament would only be able to watch from one side...because upon interfering, heaven's punishment would be triggered, causing even a Daofather who tried to withstand it to perish.

Next...Ning suddenly felt a powerful desire enter his heart.

"I've had enough. ENOUGH!!!" Within his own mind, Ning let out a howl of utter despair. "I've had ENOUGH of this feeling of powerlessness. I don't want any more of my loved ones to leave me. I don't have it. I WON'T HAVE IT!"

His mother had passed away...

His father had passed away...

And now, even his master was going to pass away...

Ning's heart felt like it was being chopped apart by knives! An incomparably powerful desire filled him; the desire to not let him or his loved ones be toyed with by destiny. A desire to completely control his own destiny, his own fate.

"I need to grow powerful. More powerful. If I can become like Pangu, capable of establishing the heavens and forming the earth, or like Nuwa, capable of repairing the heavens or destroying them...then perhaps the so-called Celestial Tribulation would be nothing more than a joke in my eyes." For the first time in his life, Ning had the goal to truly stand at the absolute top of the Three Realms, the unquestioned top, beyond all other

powers...

...to be at Pangu's level.

Pangu, he who had established the heavens and formed the earth, creating the Primordial World.

Nuwa, who had mastered 84,000 Daos, and had become heralded as Maiden Nuwa, the 'Supremely Benevolent, Supremely Holy Pangu-God'. She had reached Pangu's level, and had also become the undisputed number one figure of the Three Realms!

At their levels...

Even the heavens and the earth would have to submit, much less the Celestial Tribulation, which was nothing more than a mere part of the heavens and the earth!

"Master..." But no matter what Ning currently desired within his heart, he wasn't able to change anything. All he could do...was watch!

.....

Although Ning and Immortal Fivecraze both felt pain and resentment... in this moment, it was the tribulant, Immortal Diancai, who truly felt utter despair.

Immortal Diancai clutched at his chest, head raised. When he saw that the vortex of lightning and clouds was not dispersing, and was instead nurturing an even more powerful bolt of lightning, Immortal Diancai felt despair. "Why are there more coming? Why are there more..."

Despair.

"Junior apprentice-sister, I'm coming." Immortal Diancai's face turned calm. He stared at the bolt of lightning forming within the skies, then pointed towards it. "Go!"

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

The five Heavenraker swords all soared into the heavens, preparing to welcome that bolt of lightning.

This time, Immortal Diancai used the most beautiful, magnificent, and most powerful sword-art he had ever used since he was born. The five Immortal swords swirled around each other, joining together as they went to welcome annihilation.

.....

Back when Immortal Diancai had merely been a third-generation disciple of the Black-White College.

“Young fellow, you should be filled with the vigor and energy of youth. Why are you like this?”

“My junior apprentice-sister is dead. Life holds no meaning for me now. Life holds no meaning!”

“Life holds no meaning? Since you feel as though life has no meaning... this old man actually just so happens to want to kill someone today. Don’t fight back. Just let me kill you.”

Whoosh.

Five unranked flying swords flew together towards the numb, despairing youth...and invisible sword-intent instantly transmitted into the youth’s brain.

One sword-stance after another was demonstrated...and the sword-art became filled with increasing despair, the utmost despair.

“Five Elements Sword, stance eighteen: Minor Five Elements Extermination!”

Each stance was more complex and inconceivable than the last.

“Five Elements Sword, stance thirty-six: Major Five Elements, All Life!”

“Hahaha...”

“Destiny brought us together, and so I will teach you this set of sword techniques. Meditate well on them, young man. Your future path will be a long one!”

That voice had echoed within his mind.

By the time the young Diancai had woken up, he could no longer find that old man, no matter how hard he searched.

This stroke of karmic fortune caused Immortal Diancai to skyrocket in power in sword-arts. He was acknowledged by all the Loose Immortals of the Black-White College as having the highest chance of becoming a Celestial Immortal! After gaining the assistance of Ning's Dao-repository and being able to compare the techniques within to his own techniques, he gained new insights and made another breakthrough, reaching Immortal Northwalker's level. But even up till now, he had only reached the level of the seventeenth stance of the Five Elements Sword!

It must be understood that the first eighteen stances represented the first half of the technique. The next eighteen stances were far more mysterious and profound.

The old man definitely was a formidable figure of the Three Realms, given that he was able to transmit a technique such as this. Clearly, he was just wandering casually through the Three Realms, and happened upon Immortal Diancai by chance. Upon seeing that Immortal Diancai had potential, he had casually taught him this sword technique, then left. This didn't mean he had taken Diancai on as a disciple! If he had, he would've taught him Ki Refining techniques, secret arts, and more; in fact, he would often provide guidance to help Diancai work through anything he found confusing. The reality was, Immortal Diancai had to rely on himself and his own efforts in order to resolve any confusions he had regarding the Five Elements Sword!

"Huh?!"

Immortal Diancai suddenly understood.

It was like the golden light of the sun piercing through the darkness of the skies. The thunder tribulation had completely disrupted his emotions, causing him to rise to triumphant heights, then fall in an abyss of despair. Now that he was preparing to welcome death...his sword-arts broke through to a new level.

He finally comprehended what it truly meant to be reach the limits of

despair...and what the true mysteries of the 'Minor Five Elements, Extermination' technique truly meant! 1

"Five Elements Sword, stance eighteen: Minor Five Elements, Extermination!" Immortal Diancai continued to clutch at his chest, but suddenly...he smiled.

The five black flying Immortal swords in the skies, joined into the illusion of five massive mountains, had previously each been glowing with a different color of light. The light had circulated from sword to sword, joining them together and supporting each other. But Immortal Diancai suddenly willed them to change...

Rumble...

Space itself seemed to shake.

The five illusory mountains suddenly merged into a single illusion, an enormous five-fingered mountain. The five mountains had become one! There were five peaks jutting out from the top of this mountain like five fingers; each peak was of a different color! The mountain carried with it a feeling of incomparably heavy despair and depression, as though its despair could smother and exterminate anything in the world!

This was the final stance of the first half of the Five Elements Sword, the sword-stance that represented mastery of the first half...Minor Five Elements Extermination!

Rumble...

The forty-sixth bolt of skythunder crashed against the five Heavenraker swords which appeared like a mountain with five fingers stretching out from its peak.

The entire mountain trembled slightly, and the bolt of skythunder was dispersed.

Rumble...

The forty-seventh bolt of lightning came crashing down!

Still holding his chest, Immortal Diancai just smiled as he stared

upwards. The five Heavenraker swords went up to greet the lightning, and the mountain peak they formed was incomparably tall and massive, so much so that its peak seemed to encompass this entire minor world. Once more, it blocked the bolt of skythunder.

.....

“This...” Immortal Fivecraze and Ning were both stunned. Both of them had been gripped by despair, but now they were stunned.

“Earlier, junior apprentice-brother used a forbidden technique to overcome the first five nine-sets of the thunder tribulation. Why is it that the sixth set has become so simple for him?” Immortal Fivecraze was completely flabbergasted. “A sudden breakthrough? But...but...a breakthrough during the Celestial Tribulation?”

Ning felt dazed as well. Generally speaking, one might make sudden breakthroughs in combat, but the crashing skythunder didn't carry within it any of the mysteries of the Dao; it was nothing more than raw, primalistic strikes of lightning. Could it be that somehow, it had taught his master something? How did his master's sword-arts suddenly become this powerful?

Although Ning didn't know how his master had made a sudden breakthrough, he still felt his heart become filled with the utmost of joy.

“Hahaha...keep blocking. Keep blocking!” Ning watched eagerly.

One thunderbolt after another continued to come crashing down. Each time, Immortal Diancai used the ‘Minor Five Elements Extermination’ to defend against the attack...but starting from the fifty-first bolt, he was clearly beginning to find it a bit difficult! The power of the fifty-second bolt caused his five Immortal swords to be smashed downwards by three hundred meters, and the fifty-third bolt caused the illusory mountain his swords had created to nearly be dispersed!

“The last one...the last one!” Ning and Immortal Fivecraze both stared intently.

BOOM!

The fifty-fourth bolt of skythunder came crashing down! This bolt of skythunder was tinged with a hint of violet light.

“Block!” Immortal Diancai’s aura actually grew even more powerful; his Dao-heart had been baptized by despair and grown even more stronger. The five Heavenraker swords ferociously battled upwards, transforming into an enormous illusory mountain.

BANG!!!!

The skythunder and the mountain crashed against each other. The mountain was completely destroyed and the five Immortal swords were blasted away...but the skythunder was completely dispersed as well.

“HE BLOCKED IT!” Immortal Fivecraze let out an excited howl.

Ning raised his head, staring intently at the lightning-cloud vortex in the skies. Immortal Fivecraze immediately did the same as well. Both were worried that even more skythunder would be coming. However...this time, no more came. The vortex of lightning in the skies began to dissipate towards the four directions, and as they did, a single streak of electricity began to swirl around Immortal Diancai’s body.

When this streak of lightning appeared and descended upon Immortal Diancai, his aura began to subtly change and grow profound; this was an aura that completely surpassed that of Void-level Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals.

“A Celestial Immortal Body.” Ning and Immortal Fivecraze both revealed looks of delight.

“Congratulations, Master.” After the final flickers of electricity disappeared, Ning immediately called out to his master in a loud voice.

“Junior apprentice-brother, that was a thunder tribulation of six nine-sets. It’s utterly unfathomable that a Ki Refiner actually met with six nine-sets...I imagine that generally, only disciples of Daofathers and other legendary figures would be subjected to such a tribulation. But you actually overcame it! Ahaha, I’m in utter awe of you. Junior apprentice-brother, hurry up and rest up; soon, the demonheart tribulation will

arrive. You've already overcome the most dangerous and most terrifying tribulation, the thunder tribulation; don't be felled by the demonheart tribulation," Immortal Fivecraze said.

"Right." Immortal Diancai nodded calmly, a smile on his face. He pointed a finger towards Ning, and all five Heavenraker swords immediately flew towards Ning. "I no longer need these five Immortal swords."

Ning nodded, immediately taking back the five Heavenraker swords.

"The demonheart tribulation will take a minimum of seven days," Immortal Fivecraze said solemnly. "Ji Ning, when my junior apprentice-brother is undergoing his demonheart tribulation...we absolutely cannot allow anyone to disturb him. If there are any enemies preparing to attack, they will most likely do so during this final tribulation. You and I both need to be careful."

"Right. Understood. No one will be permitted to disturb my master," Ning said seriously as well.

His true body had trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]; it was extremely well-suited for close combat. He truly wasn't worried about anyone in terms of a head-on fight. As for his Primaltwin, it had the [Heavenraker] sword formation, which would be formed from nine Heavenraker Immortal swords. All by himself, he would be able to deal with two Celestial Immortals.

No one would be allowed to interfere! No one at all! Regardless of who they were or who their backer was...they would not be permitted to disturb his master's tribulation!

.....

Within Stillwater Commandery. A ripple appeared in the darkness of the empty skies, and a white-robed female suddenly emerged from the ripple.

She had a slim, pretty face and a reserved aura, but she was on the level of an Earth Immortal or Loose Immortal. Her eyes, however, were filled

with a natural arrogance, an arrogance that held all those before her in contempt.

“Mm?” The white-robed woman stared at the distant mountains. “Here we are!”

*

1. This is a wordplay; the word ‘extermination’ here is a two-part word, ‘miejue’ that when taken together means ‘extermination/complete destruction’, but when read separately can be interpreted as destroying despair.

Chapter 15: Enemy

The white-robed woman stood there in the void, staring at the mountain range. She immediately waved her hand, producing a bronze talisman within it. She filled the talisman with her elemental ki.

Rumble...the talisman became scorchingly hot.

This mountain range was, in reality, the headquarters for the Blood God Church; it was known as the Bloodlake Mountains. There were layers of formations protecting this mountain range, causing even the Northmont clan of Stillwater to be unable to do anything to it.

Within the mountains. A towering, large palace.

Above the palace, there was a jade bed that emanated with a hint of azure light. Seated atop the jade bed was a blood-robed man whose eyes glowed with a bloody light. He was the leader of the Blood God Church, the Scion of the Blood God!

“Eh?” The Scion frowned, then immediately waved his hand, producing a bronze talisman of his own. The talisman had become scorchingly hot.

The Scion was startled for a moment...then he immediately disappeared from atop the jade bed. Moments later, he appeared in the air above the mountains. Based on the resonance from the talismans, he turned to look towards the white-robed woman’s direction, then took a single step and arrived before her. He bowed respectfully. “Greetings, Emissary!”

“Yet another Void-level Earth Immortal is undergoing a tribulation within your Stillwater Commandery,” the white-robed woman said calmly. “It is Immortal Diancai of the Black-White College. Here is the detailed intelligence information about him.” As she spoke, she tossed over a leatherbound scroll towards the Scion of the Blood God, who immediately accepted it in a respectful manner.

The white-robed woman gave the Scion a glance, then snorted and departed gracefully, quickly disappearing into the distant horizons.

The Scion stood there in the air, scroll in hand. He watched in a cold,

sinister manner as the woman left. “A mere Emissary dares to put on such airs before me? If it wasn’t for the power behind you, I would’ve annihilated you with a wave of my hand.”

Whoosh. The Scion opened the scroll, which had detailed information regarding Immortal Diancai’s tribulation, as well as a map and directions.

“He’s actually in a minor world, with the entrance being in the Darknorth Sea?” The Scion couldn’t help but feel a chill as he read the information. “This mysterious power...they are a bit too all-knowing...how can they even know about such a well-hidden tribulation location?”

He had only interacted with this mysterious power for roughly thirty years...but the more he interacted with them, the more terrifying he found them to be!

They had given him just a slight bit of help, but that had been already enough to make his Blood God Church strong enough to tussle against the Northmont clan of Stillwater. Although their roots weren’t as powerful and as deep as the Northmont clan’s...there was no way for the Northmont clan to wipe out the Blood God Church now.

“They’ve already given me two intelligence reports regarding Earth Immortals undergoing a tribulation. This is the third one.” The Scion frowned. “How on earth did they find out?”

A traitor or a spy?

The Scion of the Blood God didn’t believe it!

Earth Immortals were extremely cautious when undergoing their tribulations; they would only invite protectors that they had absolute faith in! In addition, they would usually personally use a spatial teleport to go to the tribulation location; not even the protectors would know exactly where the tribulation would be attempted. Indeed, Ji Ning and Immortal Fivecraze weren’t told in advance, and they didn’t know exactly where in the Darknorth Sea the island they had been taken to was located!

“How did they find out? This is too incredible. I’ve heard from others

that due to the fact that the Three Realms are filled with dangerous undercurrents, fate and destiny have been thrown into a state of chaos, making it virtually impossible for someone to Foretell where a tribulation will occur,” the Scion mused puzzledly. Normally, powerful experts of the Three Realms might be able to Foretell through augury some rather well-hidden mysteries...but fate itself had been thrown into a state of flux. There was no way to do so now!

“No wonder they hold the Grand Xia Dynasty with no regard. No wonder they dare to act against the entire Dynasty,” the Scion mused privately. “Doesn’t matter. I’m not going to make enemies with them; all I need to do is borrow from their strength to strengthen myself. As long as they can strengthen my Blood God Church, that’s all that matters.”

“Right. This Immortal Diancai is of the Black-White College; the Black-White College is one of the strongest supporters of the Northmont clan of Stillwater. They are one of their most loyal dogs! I need to seize this chance to wound them,” the Scion nodded to himself.

Although the white-robed Emissary had delivered the intelligence report, she hadn’t ordered the Scion to do anything.

To kill or not? This was up to the Scion himself. If he chose not to attack, the mysterious power wouldn’t care.

Whoosh.

The Scion of the Blood God returned to his palace.

“Have the seven Law Protectors come see me right away,” the Scion instructed from atop his jade bed.

“Yes,” an attendant said respectfully.

Soon, seven black-robed Law Protectors hurried over.

“Greetings, sect leader,” the seven black-robed Law Protectors said respectfully.

“Immortal Diancai of the Black-White College is currently undergoing his tribulation. The Black-White College is one of the most loyal dogs of

the Northmont clan; we need to seize this chance to eradicate Immortal Diancai,” the Scion said calmly. “The other Immortals of the Black-White College are all within their College; it is very likely that the only guardians with him right now are his disciple Ji Ning as well as Immortal Fivecraze, the most powerful member of the Black-White College.”

“Make a trip with me. Let us eradicate these three members of the Black-White College,” the Scion of the Blood God said. “With these three gone, the Black-White College will be badly wounded; this is akin to breaking one of the Northmont clan’s legs.”

“Sect leader, just the seven of us and yourself? Will it be enough? I heard that this Ji Ning had gone missing for thirty-plus years; he must have taken on an expert of the Three Realms as his master.”

“The Black-White College isn’t easy to deal with; even if the seven of us go along with you, we will still probably suffer some losses even if we win.”

The seven Law Protectors were all hesitating.

The Scion said calmly, “Don’t worry. I have complete confidence; do you think I would let the seven of you take on any serious danger?”

The seven Law Protectors raised their heads to stare at the Sion of the Blood God.

“Hmph.” The Scion let out a cold snort, then waved his hand. A small black ship had appeared within his palm.

“This is...” The eyes of the seven Law Protectors lit up.

“With this treasure in my hands...I trust you are all convinced now?” The Scion said.

“We shall naturally obey your orders, sect leader.” The seven Law Protectors no longer hesitated.

The Scion immediately sent a further mental order: “Three Elders, the seven Law Protectors and I are going out on a trip. The affairs within the Church shall temporarily be managed by you three.”

“Don’t worry, sect leader. Leave it to us,” the three Elders replied.

“Let’s go!”

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

With the Scion in front and the seven Law Protectors behind, the eight flew high into the sky, moving like streaks of light. And then, they quickly used a spatial teleport to disappear.

.....

The distant Darknorth Sea. The air above the island with a volcano.

The blood-robed Scion of the Blood God along with the seven black-robed Law Protectors were all standing in the air above the island.

“The entrance to the minor world is there, within that volcano,” the Scion said calmly. “Based on our intelligence report, Immortal Diancai should have spent two days undergoing the tribulation by now. If he failed in overcoming the fire, wind, or thunder tribulations, then he is most likely either dead or a Loose Immortal by now. Even if he survived... he should currently be undergoing the demonheart tribulation.”

“Later, do as I instructed to you previously.” The Scion swept the seven Law Protectors with his gaze.

“Yes, sect leader,” the seven black-robed Law Protectors said respectfully.

“Go in.”

The Scion of the Blood God gave the order. Swoosh swoosh swoosh!!! Eight streaks of light instantly streaked across the sky, entering the mouth of the volcano.

Soon after they disappeared, there was yet another a ripple in space near the entrance to the volcano. Twelve white-robed figures emerged, the leader a figure with a bloody scar on the arm.

“The forces of the Blood God Church of Stillwater Commandery have entered,” a white-robed youth said with a chortle. “Captain, you truly predicted everything in a godlike manner; you knew that they would

definitely go.”

“The Black-White College is located right in Stillwater Commandery; over the course of countless ages, they have always walked in lockstep with the Northmont clan of Stillwater! The Northmont clan, in turn, has always protected the Black-White College. Of the eight great powers, the Black-White College is the most loyal one; naturally, the Blood God Church will seize this chance to annihilate Immortal Diancai during his Celestial Tribulation.” The leader, a white-robed man, continued calmly, “By borrowing from their strength, our own assassination attempt will become easier.”

“Is there a need for us to be so cautious in dealing with Ji Ning?”

“Right. Even our superiors simply instructed us to be careful of the school behind Ji Ning; he himself isn’t worthy of such concern. We’ve killed even Celestial Immortals; how powerful can a young fellow who has trained for less than a century possibly, even if he is a Daofather’s disciple?”

They all spoke out. The leader, the scarred white-robed man, laughed. “Ji Ning naturally isn’t worthy of concern, but I’m afraid that if something unexpected happens, his school might intervene. That’s why this assassination must be a quick one! We need to avoid anything unexpected.”

“Right.” Everyone nodded. They were all mainly worried about Ning’s school, worried that a True Immortal or Empyrean God might suddenly appear and massacre them!

No one knew where Ning had disappeared to during the past thirty-plus years. However, the intelligence reports which the Bloodcloud Hall had received indicated that his disappearance...was almost assuredly linked to an extraordinary twist of fate!

“Execute our assassination plan,” the scarred, white-robed man said solemnly.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh!!!

The twelve figures instantly disappeared as they too entered the mouth of the volcano.

.....

Within the charred minor world that was filled with an aura of death.

Immortal Diancai was seated in the lotus position. Three thousand meters away from him, an enormous restrictive formation had been set up, and the surface of the formation glowed with light.

Within the formation were only two figures; Immortal Diancai and the Whitewater Hound.

Ji Ning and Immortal Fivecraze were both outside this grand sealing formation!

Earlier, during the wind, fire, and thunder tribulations, Ning's group hadn't dared to set down any formations...they didn't wish to disturb the Celestial Tribulation and incur divine punishment. They would've been finished! But now that they were at the final tribulation, the demonheart tribulation, setting up a grand restrictive formation no longer made any difference whatsoever. Ning and Immortal Fivecraze were both worried about enemies would sneak close through using some technique to avoid divine sense scans, and so they had set up this grand sealing formation.

With it present, one would have to either break the formation or use a Greater Teleportation technique in order to reach Immortal Diancai!

"This is master's second day undergoing the demonheart tribulation." Ning turned to glance at Immortal Diancai, seated calmly in the lotus position at the center of the grand sealing formation. No one knew what Immortal Diancai's demonheart tribulation was like; generally speaking, wayward thoughts were easily to withstand, but if one had to withstand them for an extremely long period of time...

It must be understood that at least seven days of time in the real world had to pass, but within the world of the demonheart tribulation, ten thousand years or more might pass. Some would even forget what reality was, and they would be completely submerged within the illusory world

until finally they perished!

“Eh?” Ning was suddenly startled as a terrifying premonition of danger swept out from within his subconscious.

“Danger!” Ning sent frantically, “Old brother Fivecraze, Uncle White, be careful. I can sense danger drawing near!” Immortal practitioners generally had extremely accurate subconscious premonitions. However, Ning was quite astonished at the fact that he had such a powerful premonition of danger...because he had already trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]! Logically speaking, there should be very few things in the world capable of threatening him.

“Even if enemies came to attack Master...can it be that the amount of power they prepared is enough to threaten me as well?” Ning could barely believe it. “If that’s the case, then we are in for huge trouble.”

Ning’s eyes suddenly lit up with torch-light.

[Torch Dragon’s Eye]!

He immediately scanned in every direction with both his divine sense as well as the [Torch Dragon’s Eye].

Chapter 16: No Mercy When Striking

“Danger?” Both Immortal Fivecraze and the Whitewater Hound were startled, but neither of them doubted Ji Ning in the slightest. As time passed, they too began to subconsciously sense danger impending.

Immortal Fivecraze, in particular, felt cold fear his heart. He was stunned by this. “What sort of danger is this? Why is it that I feel so threatened? Nothing’s even happened yet, but I already feel somewhat terrified?!”

“Ji Ning?” Immortal Fivecraze looked towards Ning.

“Uncle White, prepare to use your formations; no one is permitted to go close to Master. Old brother Fivecraze, be careful,” Ning instructed. His eyes were blazing with torch-fire as he continued to scan the surrounding area.

All of the light from the distance, including refracted light and bounced light, were all being drawn into Ning’s eyes.

More than sixty thousand kilometers away.

“There they are!” Ning could clearly see a giant black ship that was flying towards them from far away. Atop the giant black ship, there were eight blurry figures standing atop the deck. The leader was a blood-robed man who was filled with an unearthly, baleful aura. Behind him were seven black-robed individuals.

Ning was aware of all of the famous Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals within Stillwater Commandery, and had seen pictures of them in scrolls.

“The leader of the Blood God Church and their seven Law Protectors?” Ning was startled. “How did they find out that my master was undergoing the tribulation here?”

His master had led the three of them into a spatial teleport and directly arrived at this volcano within the Darknorth Sea; neither Ning nor Immortal Fivecraze knew exactly where this volcano was! Could it be that

his master had himself revealed it to another? Impossible!

“No wonder so many Earth Immortals have suffered assaults during their tribulation here in the Grand Xia as of late,” Ning mused to himself. “It seems the culprit behind these events must have a special method to clearly sense where a Celestial Tribulation is occurring.”

This caused Ning to feel even more nervous. The power behind these things...what in the world was it?

No wonder even the Old Patriarch had felt fear. The mere fact that this person was able to calculate where Earth Immortals were undergoing their tribulation...this was already something that was entirely inconceivable.

“It seems that things are as Master said; I cannot fight head-on against this sort of power. If I prance about in front of it, most likely my fate can be summarized in one word; death!” Ning could dimly sense that this approaching storm was going to be like a massive tidal wave which no one could possibly block; anyone who tried would be smashed apart. Not even Patriarch Subhuti dared to attempt to block it; if Ning did, he would undoubtedly be crushed to smithereens as well.

“I don’t dare go cause trouble for the mastermind. But little shrimps like the Blood God Church? They are nothing.” This, Ning understood well.

.....

“It is the Blood God Church.” Ning immediately sent a mental message to Immortal Fivecraze and Uncle White. “A total of eight have arrived; they are the sect leader and his seven Law Protectors.”

“What? The Blood God Church? No wonder my subconscious was telling me that this threat was so dangerous.” Immortal Fivecraze’s face instantly changed dramatically as he frantically sent mentally to Ning, “Ji Ning, the leader of the Blood God Church’s power has increased dramatically; he is able to compete against Celestial Immortals now. As for his seven Law Protectors, each of them increased dramatically in power as well; each are most likely comparable to me. Given the power of the eight of them...there’s no way I can block them at all. I’d probably die

within a single breath's worth of time!"

The seven Law Protectors of the Blood God Church, thirty years ago, were nothing more than ordinary Loose Immortals! At most, they were perhaps on par with Loose Immortals who had lived for a hundred thousand years.

Now, however, they had all increased in power enormously, at the five hundred thousand year level, very close to Immortal Fivecraze's own level!

"Understood." Ning grew solemn as well.

"What should we do? How should we stop them?" Immortal Fivecraze was restless and nervous. "They are too powerful, far more powerful than the three of us. Ji Ning, although you are comparable to senior Northwalker, there are eight of them. So long as a single one of them goes to fight against junior apprentice-brother Diancai, they'll be able to kill him!"

During the demonheart tribulation, one's mind would be completely subsumed within the demonheart world. There was no way to fight back in the real world at all. Thus, Ning's group not only had to overcome the foe, they also had to be able to completely block the eight of them. If a single one managed to slip by...

"Leave it to me." Ning's eyes were filled with a sharp light. "Old brother Fivecraze, go into the grand sealing formation right away. Stay close to my master and protect him. As for these eight...leave them to me. If any make it pass me, it'll be up to you."

"Fine." Immortal Fivecraze didn't hesitate, and the Whitewater Hound immediately let him inside.

Ning's eyes blazed like torches as he watched the giant black ship slowly draw near. Soon, it reached ten thousand kilometers of Ning. By now, the members of the Blood God Church could see the distant grand sealing formation with their naked eyes.

"A grand sealing formation." The Scion of the Blood God laughed coldly. "It seems this Immortal Diancai has already overcome the first three

tribulations of wind, fire, and thunder. He is engaged in the demonheart tribulation. If we didn't come...he might very well have succeeded and become a new Celestial Immortal. Alas...this impending Celestial Immortal of the Black-White College is about to die a stillborn death at our hands."

Rumble...

A powerful divine sense came sweeping outwards in a wave, crushing down towards the eight of them. The divine sense roared angrily, "Scion of the Blood God, seven Law Protectors, I'm asking you to hurry up and leave!"

"Ji Ning! He lives up to his reputation as the number one peerless genius of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny; his divine sense is able to stretch over ten thousand kilometers." The Scion's own divine sense interacted with Ning's. "Ji Ning, your master is undergoing his tribulation, yes? Don't deny it; we know it all. Heh heh...I can see that your master is only being protected by yourself, Fivecraze, and that Whitewater Hound spirit-beast of yours. Ahaha, that's too weak. With this amount of power...there's no way you'll be able to stop me."

The Scion felt absolute self-confidence.

"Scion of the Blood Good, if you leave now, then I, Ji Ning, shall remember your kindness in showing mercy on this day," Ning sent back angrily through divine sense. "But if you attack...then I, Ji Ning, shall begin a death-feud with your Blood God Church!"

The Scion could sense the savagery and madness within Ning's voice. He couldn't help but feel briefly startled...but then he snickered, "Death-feud? Not even the Northmont clan of Stillwater was able to do anything to me; I'm supposed to be afraid of you?"

"Seven Law Protectors, leave Ji Ning to me; I'll handle him. As for Fivecraze and that spirit-beast, I'll leave them to you. While dealing with Fivecraze...go ahead and kill Immortal Diancai," the Scion sent. "Up to the task?"

"Don't worry, sect leader."

“Just leave it to us, sect leader.”

The seven Law Protectors all felt complete confidence. In truth, they were only wary of Ji Ning; after all, Ji Ning was simply too mysterious. However, they now only had to deal with Immortal Fivecraze and that spirit-beast. They were still quite confident in being able to do so! The seven of them, joined together, were able to completely crush and dominated Fivecraze. As for the Whitewater Hound spirit-beast? According to the intelligence report, it had previously been merely at the Wanxiang level in the past; although it was now at the Void-level, it had risen too fast and most likely did not have a solid foundation. Killing it would be effortless!

“Fine!” The Scion laughed and said, “Then let’s do it!”

BANG!

The black ship suddenly drew near at high speed. Three thousand kilometers. Two thousand. One thousand...

“Attack,” the Scion shouted mentally.

“Let’s go!” The seven Law Protectors came out in a great show of force as the seven of them soared into the skies like seven black shadows. Immediately afterwards, streaks of bloody light began to swirl around them, joining together into a Blood Dragon that was more than three thousand meters long. This Blood Dragon was covered with distinct draconic scales, had long draconic whiskers, and a pair of eyes that were filled with a killing intent.

Since they were reputed as the Seven Law Protectors, they naturally had their own joint formation. Back in the past, when they were weak, they had relied on this formation to roam Stillwater Commandery fearlessly; now that they were powerful, they were close to the level of a Loose Immortal who had survived for a million years.

Whoosh...

The Blood Dragon flew to one side, avoiding Ji Ning. The giant black warship, however, flew straight towards him. Atop the deck stood the

Scion of the Blood God, whose eyes were filled with fiendish savagery. His divine sense once more clashed against Ning's as he sent, "Ji Ning, you can block me, but you can't block my seven Law Protectors. Your master is definitely going to die. As for you...I actually want to see for myself exactly how powerful the number one genius of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny is!"

"Hmph." Ning laughed coldly as he stood there...but his heart was clenching!

For the sake of protecting his master, Ning had made many preparations. Although the eight members of the Blood God Church were seemingly powerful...Ning was completely confident in being able to stop them. There was no way the eight of them could pose a mortal threat to him...but his premonitions of danger couldn't be wrong. Where, then, was the danger hiding?

"All I can do is handle it when it comes," Ning mused to himself.

.....

Immortal Fivecraze stood a few dozen meters away from Immortal Diancai, seven Immortal swords swirling around him. His heart was filled with worry. "Ji Ning said that he'll block them, and that any that get past him I am to handle. But the Scion of the Blood God is now dealing with him while the seven Law Protectors are attacking this way. How can I block seven of them? If I, a Loose Immortal who has lived a few hundred thousand years, were to perish, it wouldn't matter...but junior apprentice-brother was able to overcome even six nine-sets of the thunder tribulation. If he were to be killed by the Blood God Church, that would be too unfair."

"No matter what...even if I have to give up this old life of mine...I have to protect my junior apprentice-brother." Immortal Fivecraze gritted his teeth, staring towards the distant Blood Dragon.

The seven Law Protectors, in the form of a Blood Dragon, radiated an unearthly, terrifying aura.

As the Blood Dragon drew close, it suddenly lashed out with its tail. In

truth, its tail was actually formed from multiple Immortal-ranked magic treasures, including Immortal swords and ribbons!

Rumble...

The tail slammed down directly upon the grand sealing formation, instantly causing it to crack.

At this moment, the Whitewater Hound, who had previously been lying there silently, rose to his feet. Next to him appeared a black-robed youth; it was Ning's Primaltwin! Ning could sense that danger was coming, and so he left his true body outside the formation to serve as the first line of defense, while he had his Primaltwin remain within the formation to serve as the second line of defense.

"You want to harm my master?!" A fierce light flashed through the eyes of the black-robed Ning, and suddenly, nine seemingly translucent pitch-black Immortal swords suddenly appeared out of nowhere next to him.

"Nine of them?" Immortal Fivecraze was both surprised and delighted. "So there were actually nine of those top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords...and Ji Ning, that little kid, actually hid his Primaltwin here. This little fellow...he scared the crap out of me. But will his Primaltwin be able to block these seven Law Protectors?"

Immortal Fivecraze knew very well that he himself was not. It would all be up to Ning.

Riiiiip.

Nine sword-tears in the sky suddenly appeared, like deep furrows that had been raked into it. The nine tears were like an enormous web of swords that swept towards the giant Blood Dragon.

"Break!" The Blood Dragon let out an enraged roar that sounded like the merged voices of all seven Law Protectors, and at the same time it once more slapped its tail towards it.

Riiiiiiip!

Slash!

Whoosh!

Nine sword-tears, each comparable to the strike of an ordinary Celestial Immortal. When combined...the power of this blow surpassed even the power of Ning's true body! When the attacks collided, the tail of the Blood Dragon, its most powerful part, instantly shattered apart. The Immortal-ranked magic treasures were all knocked flying back...and then the rest of the Blood Dragon was shattered as well. The nine sword-tears then continued forward in beautiful arcs, chopping towards the seven Law Kings.

"Die." The black-robed Ning's eyes were filled with nothing but coldness.

Chapter 17: Squad Earthnine Makes Their Move

“Quick, let’s go.”

“Sect leader!”

The seven Law Protectors let out shrill cries of terror. Their combination-formation had been instantly shattered; this completely terrified them. They didn’t even think about fighting back. There was only one thing in their mind; fleeing! The magic treasures that had been knocked backwards were all re-controlled by the seven Law Protectors as they instantly began to execute their escaping techniques.

However...

The black-robed Ji Ning was using the [Heavenraker] technique, a sword technique that was extremely well-suited for engaging in group attacks! In addition, this technique involved nine Immortal-ranked flying swords, whereas there were only seven enemies!

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Under Ning’s control, one tear in the sky appeared after another, ripping towards the seven Law Protectors.

Each of the Law Protectors had Immortal-ranked magic treasures of their own, but by the looks of it theirs were quite ordinary. One of them, a silver-haired, hawk-nosed elder, had a total of three flying swords, whereas a youthful-looking one was controlling a large amount of stardust. Each of these two Loose Immortals were being pursued by a pair of Heavenraker swords, while the others were each being pursued by one!

“Block.” The youthful-looking Loose Immortals was the most powerful of the seven. His dazzling, sparkling stardust was furiously attempting to block those two half-illusory Heavenraker swords.

Bang! Bang!

Those two tears in the sky forcefully tore through all his barriers,

slicing apart his body and revealing a shattered Goldlotus Primal within it. Moments later...the Primal soul completely dissipated.

Die!

“Sect leader, save me!” A black-robed, sinister-looking female Loose Immortal called out frantically for aid, but she too was slashed and slain by one of the Heavenraker swords!

.....

It must be understood that Ning had completed his overhauling of the ninth stance of the [Three-Foot Sword] more than five or six years ago. During the past few years, he had been working on the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] and learning archery. This, too, was a way of meditating on the Dao! His improvements in wind and in the Grand Dao of Qiankun were especially significant, and thus Ning’s sword-arts had naturally become more exquisite as well!

In terms of sword-arts, Ning was at an extremely high level now. In addition, he had nine top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, whereas the seven Law Protectors mostly had low-grade Immortal-ranked treasures, with just a few middle-grade; in fact, some of them were still using Heaven-ranked treasures.

In addition, Ning was using the [Heavenraker] sword technique, a technique developed by a Daofather which was perfectly matched to his Heavenraker swords. Naturally, the power of his attack was increased many times over.

Each of the nine Heavenraker swords, even when used separately, were able to unleash an attack at the level of an ordinary Celestial Immortal.

Thus...

All seven of the Law Protectors perished!

Whoosh! The nine tears in the sky swept backwards, pulling in all of the now ownerless magic treasures in their wake as they flew back towards the black-robed Ning, who collected them.

“This...this is...too...” Immortal Fivecraze’s eyes were filled with wild joy, and he stared towards the black-robed Ning with a scorchingly excited gaze. “Ji Ning, those were the seven Law Protectors, the seven famous Law Protectors! You actually killed them in a single exchange. Everyone said that when the seven Law Protectors join forces, anyone below the Celestial Immortal level will find it difficult to fight against them, but you, you actually...you aren’t at senior Northwalker’s level, you are even more powerful than he was!”

The black-robed Ning said, “In terms of my insight into the sword, I’m actually not that much better than senior Northwalker was. The most important thing is that I have a set of nine top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, as well as a sword-art which was developed by a Daofather. Thus, even if an actual Celestial Immortal Patriarch came, my Primaltwin would be able to give him a fight!”

.....

The Blood God Church’s forces had been divided into two groups. The seven Law Protectors had gone to go after the seemingly-helpless Immortal Fivecraze and Whitewater Hound, whereas the sect leader, the Scion of the Blood God, had went to deal with Ji Ning’s true body.

“Prepare to die.” The Scion stood atop his giant black warship. Long gray awls suddenly appeared behind his body, their tips glowing with bloody light. A total of nine of these gray awls appeared before all of them shot through the skies, forming a vague illusion of a bloody tidal wave as they moved forward!

The nine gray awls came howling forward, carrying the wave of blood with them.

Ning’s true body stood there, staring towards the distant attack.

“Hmph.” Ning waved his hand, and the Thousandbull Sword appeared within it. He filled the Thousandbull Sword with his late-stage Void-level elemental ki, and the power of this sword which was very nearly at the level of a Pure Yang treasure instantly reached a shocking height.

“This Thousandbull Sword truly is very close to the level of a Pure Yang

treasure; a magic treasure like this, which was forged by a person, has extremely exacting requirements in terms of elemental ki. Only Celestial Immortals can use Pure Yang treasures, and this Thousandbull Sword is extremely close to that level; amongst Immortal-ranked treasures, it is a top-grade amongst top-grade items. In the past, I used early-stage Void-level elemental ki to activate its power, but I still wasn't able to fully unleash it. Only after reaching the late-stage am I able to truly stir its power. However...it still isn't time for me to truly unleash its full power!"

Ning's subconscious continued to scream danger to him...but he still couldn't tell where the danger was! This restless feeling caused Ning to continue to hide part of his power, so as to deal with anything unexpected.

"Arise." Instantly, an enormous Lotusflower Swordland appeared around him. Because the earthfire and dire-ice in his body had yet to be raised to the skyfire or skywater level, the power of his Waterflame Lotus was still inferior to that of the Lotusflower Swordland.

An enormous lotus bloomed around him, filled with layers of petals. Now that he had a higher level of comprehension regarding the Dao, the power of his Lotusflower Swordland had increased as well.

Boom! Boom! Boom! One bloody awl after another came slamming forward, tearing through one layer of petals after another.

Ning gripped his Thousandbull Sword. Sword-light suddenly flashed in front of him, blocking each of the sharp awls. Explosive sounds rang out without end, and sword-ki billowed forth in a torrent.

By relying on his Lotusflower Swordland and his Thousandbull Sword, Ning was able to knock each of the awls flying backwards.

"Eh?" The Scion was controlling his magic treasures to attack from afar while also watching his seven Law Protectors. "This Ji Ning actually is quite formidable. Although I've only used a third of my power, he hasn't used his [Three Heads, Six Arms] either. He was able to block while just using a single Immortal sword. It seems that if I don't fight with full power, it will be hard for me to kill him. He's so powerful, despite only

having trained for a century...it seems people like him, the number one peerless genius and champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, truly are quite special. Mm...after the seven Law Protectors kill Fivecraze, Diancai, and that spirit-beast, we'll join forces...and kill Ji Ning!"

The Scion had thought things out 'perfectly'. But he suddenly discovered, to his amazement...

That a black-robed Ning had suddenly appeared within the grand sealing formation.

"A Primaltwin? Ji Ning actually split up with his Primaltwin? Isn't he afraid of them being divided and conquered? He's quite suicidal to do this." The Scion was merely startled; he didn't actually panic. As he saw it, even if the seven Law Protectors weren't able to suppress Ning's Primaltwin when they joined forces, at least they should be on par with him.

"Those are..."

Nine terrifyingly powerful Immortal-ranked magic treasures, of such great might that they caused the heart to tremble. They howled through the air as nine sword-formations, blasting apart and disintegrating the Blood Dragon.

The seven Law Protectors fled in a panic, crying out miserably for rescue...but each of them were caught and killed.

The Scion was completely stunned!

Ning's Primaltwin was vastly more powerful than he had expected. Even if he himself were to strike with full force, there was no way he would've been able to destroy the Blood Dragon with a single blow! It must be understood that when two sides were roughly on par with each other, one side would at most be put in a disadvantageous position. To completely blast apart the enemy...that was generally only possible when there was a fairly significant difference in power! This Ji Ning's Primaltwin was even more powerful than himself, the sect leader!

"My seven Law Protectors are gone...just like that." The Scion felt utter

pain in his heart. “This Ji Ning is absolutely inhuman. He’s a monster! He’s trained for less than a century, but he’s even more powerful than the secret arts I acquired. I imagine that in the entirety of Stillwater Commandery, only that old bastard, ‘Hunchmont’, is at his level.”

“My seven Law Protectors died...I need to teach him a lesson!” A look of savagery appeared in the eyes of the Scion.

The disciples of the Blood God Church were all famous for their brutal savagery, and the Scion of the Blood God himself was known to be a madman. In addition, he had his precious ship with him; why would he leave so easily?

Swoosh!

The long awls suddenly flew backwards, and the giant black warship began to rapidly shrink. The Scion hid himself into the cabin of the warship, which then completely sealed itself off like a fortress.

“Ji Ning, you killed my seven Law Protectors, but I shall kill your master.” The Scion’s bellowing voice echoed in the skies, but he secretly mused to himself, “My losses today were enormous, but killing Diancai should count as having rendered major merits. I have to get some good treasures out of this.”

.....

Ning hadn’t been paying too much attention to the Scion of the Blood God; he had been spending most of his time staying vigilant and prepared for the invisible threat that he continued to sense. He was ready to fight back at any moment.

Upon seeing the Scion suddenly hide into the shrunken black warship, which was now as tightly sealed as any castle, Ning just frowned and sent mentally, “Uncle White, activate your formation and block the Scion of the Blood God. Don’t let him go close to master.”

“Don’t worry, Ning, son.” The Whitewater Hound hadn’t even done anything yet; he was the true, final protector of Immortal Diancai!

“This Scion is at most comparable to a Celestial Immortal; killing him

is fairly hard, but suppressing him is doable,” Ning mused to himself. “And that precious ship of his is merely a protective item...it doesn’t actually threaten me. So where is the true danger?”

Ning’s eyes continued to blaze with torch-fire as he stared at his surroundings, and his divine sense continuously scanned the area as well. But he couldn’t find anything!

But suddenly...

Rumble!

A white-robed man suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The white-robed man had a strange, bloody scar on his arm...and immediately after he appeared, eleven more white-robed figures appeared out of nowhere, each of them radiating auras of incredible power! The invisible pressure they gave off...it seemed as though each of them were comparable to the Scion of the Blood God! As for the first person who had appeared, the impression he gave Ning...was that he was far more powerful than the Scion!

“A Greater Teleportation Dao-seal!” Ning was shocked upon seeing them suddenly appear. “The surrounding area was spacelocked long ago, preventing any spatial teleportations. The only option is to use Greater Teleportation. There’s no way one of them could be a freakish monster who mastered even the Grand Dao of Qiankun...they had to have simply used a Dao-seal.”

“They were willing to use a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal, just to catch me off-guard? And those eleven who appeared afterwards...they should’ve been hiding in the Immortal estate of the leader.”

Ning was instantly able to draw these conclusions. In turn, these conclusions caused him to feel even more shocked!

Greater Teleportation Dao-seals were extremely valuable. For them to be willing to use one right away...how terrifying would these foes be?!

“Kill!” A white-robed youth in the group let out a fierce-looking grin, then a complicated pattern of light appeared around him, forming into a

runic formation. The strange runes hovered into the air, emanating a dark light.

The other white-robed figures were all doing the same. The runic formation created by the leader involved runes that were even larger and even more complex-looking.

“Form!” Suddenly, an enormous black serpent appeared in the skies. The eyes of this giant serpent were golden, while its body seemed to be filled with a strange power that was able to shake the Heavens and the Earth, as though it had taken command of the surrounding world.

“A Primordial Godbeast...the Ba-Serpent?!” Ning was shocked.

The most supreme Godbeasts of the Three Realms were all born in the Primordial Era. They were all comparable to Fiendgods of Primal Chaos in power...and in fact, some of them actually were Fiendgods of Primal Chaos. For example, Primordial Godbeasts such as the ‘Raindragon’, the ‘Garuda’, and the Torch-Dragon were actually born from the universe out of chaos; thus, they could be classified as Fiendgods. However, because they also served as the original progenitor for many different types of Godbeasts, with countless Godbeasts having some degree of their blood and lineage, they could also be classified as Godbeasts as well, the most supreme and ancient of Godbeasts.

The Blood Dragon created by the seven Law Protectors through their formation could be considered the product of a very ordinary combination-formation.

But a formation that could form a Primordial Godbeast...such formations were all extremely formidable, and when they joined into a Godbeast, they would possess amazing, incredible powers.

.....

Although all this took time to describe, it happened in a flash.

The twelve white-robed figures instantly appeared through a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal, then immediately joined into an enormous Ba-Serpent. The Ba-Serpent, capable of shaking the Heavens and the Earth,

opened its enormous, bloody maw. The space around its mouth instantly became distorted, as though it was devouring the very world itself. An unearthly, powerful attractive power instantly locked onto Ning's body. Although Ning was a Fiendgod Body Refiner and immediately worked to resist...he was completely unable to resist the devouring power. Not too long ago, there was a Celestial Immortal Patriarch who had similarly been unable to resist and who had been devoured by this Ba-Serpent, then perished.

Swoosh!

As the distant Immortal Fivecraze and Whitewater Hound watched...the enormous Ba-Serpent devoured Ji Ning with a single bite!

Chapter 18: The Ba-Serpent and Ji Ning

“A Ba-Serpent?”

“Ning, son!”

Immortal Fivecraze and Uncle White were both shocked, especially Uncle White, who knew exactly how powerful Ji Ning had become. And yet, even he had been unable to resist that devouring force, and he had been swallowed by the Ba-Serpent in one gulp!

Although Ning’s Primaltwin was safe, they all knew that in terms of long-term potential, the true body was far superior to the Primaltwin; after all, the Primaltwin was merely a Ki Refiner, and so it was much weaker comparatively.

“What a terrifying Ba-Serpent!” The Scion of the Blood God, located within the cabin of the small black warship, was able to see what was going on outside. The heaven-shaking Ba-Serpent in particular caused him to feel completely stunned. “The power of this Ba-Serpent...its aura is even more powerful than that of that old bastard Hunchmont. Why has a force suddenly emerged to act against Ji Ning? Is this a force that comes from outside the world of the Grand Xia?”

The Scion knew his own limits; clearly, these twelve white-robed figures that had suddenly appeared out of nowhere were far more powerful than him! That Ba-Serpent alone...it was capable of suppressing Celestial Immortal Patriarchs!

“A peerless genius of this generation, Ji Ning, has most likely just perished,” the Scion murmured to himself. “Hmph. Hmph. It’s for the best. Now, I shall let your master join with you.”

.....

As the Scion of the Blood God began to charge towards the grand sealing formation. Within the ‘body’ of the Ba-Serpent.

Whoosh. An incomparably ferocious devouring force, one which Ning was completely unable to fight back against, had drawn Ning into the

giant bloody maw of the serpent.

After being swallowed...the entire world turned dark. Ning just felt that he was constantly sinking downwards...

“Transform.” As he began to sink, Ning immediately executed the [Three Heads, Six Arms] divine ability. Six Immortal swords appeared within his hands as well; they were the Thousandbull Sword, three of his Darknorth Swords, and two of the Wavebreaker Godshark Swords! This was primarily because Ning no longer had other Immortal-ranked flying swords on him; the Wavebreaker Godshark swords were top-grade Heaven-ranked flying swords he had acquired from the Treasure Hall of the underwater estate, and so they weren’t that much weaker than low-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords.

“Hahaha, Ji Ning, now that you’ve entered the body of the Ba-Serpent, you are dead for certain.” A wild laughter could suddenly be heard.

“Hahaha, you are dead.”

“Stop struggling.”

“Even Celestial Immortals will perish in here.”

Voices rang out from every direction. At the same time, quite close to Ning, a long awl suddenly shot out from a meaty ‘wall’. The awl flashed with a sinister light and moved lightning-fast. It even manifested the faint illusion of an azure hornet as it stabbed towards Ning.

Clang!!!

One of Ning’s six arms which wielded a Darknorth sword knocked the awl flying away.

Immediately afterwards, other types of magic treasures and secret arts attacks began to fly towards Ning from every which way. Because Ning was within the body of the Ba-Serpent, and the attacks were suddenly coming from the fleshly ‘walls’ within the body as well as the bones of the serpent, the attacks came from a very short distance, repeatedly catching him off guard. This caused Ning to find things quite difficult for now.

“Waters of Heaven!” Ning’s six swords struck out simultaneously, and illusions of water streams began to appear, one after another. A large amount of water began to swirl around Ning, causing the world around him to seem to change into a world of water.

This technique also came from the ninth floor of the Divinities Palace, and it was also created by a Daofather. This was a sword-art on par with the [Heavenraker] – the [Waters of Heaven]!

[Heavenraker] was well-suited for group attacks, and also against single-target foes.

[Waters of Heaven] was most suited for defense.

“No, I won’t be able to block this way.” Ning found defense to be incredibly difficult. As the saying went, two fists found it hard to fight against many hands. Although Ning currently had six arms, he was facing twelve opponents right now! The opponents each controlled many magic treasures, and every single attack was quite fearsome. The fact that the attacks were launched from such close range also made it so that Ning had very little reaction time.

“It seems I’ll have to rely on the Thousandbull Sword.”

Ning had been wanting to keep this supreme technique of the Thousandbull Sword hidden, so as to suddenly annihilate all his enemies in a surprise attack. However...these wild, chaotic attacks from his foes were already enough to force him to unleash this attack, an attack which Ning’s true body had only grown capable of unleashing after reaching the late Void-level.

“Primordial Nightriver...emerge!”

Savagery filled Ning’s eyes, and the pure, late Void-level elemental ki within his body flowed into the Thousandbull Sword, completely activate the formation-diagram within the sword! Instantly, the sound of waves could be heard as an enormous, wide river suddenly appeared in the area surrounding him. When the river appeared, part of it manifested within the body of the Ba-Serpent, while part of it manifested outside of the body!

This was because the entire Nightriver was fully ten thousand kilometers long!

Activating the Nightriver effect required a very high amount of elemental ki...but its might was similarly powerful to the extreme.

Rumble...

The waves of the river bellowed forth, sweeping across the entire region. The twelve white-robed members that made up squad 'Earthnine', hidden deep within the body of the Ba-Serpent, were all shocked. As the waters of the primordial river known as the Nightriver crushed upon them, and as the river water outside the body of the Ba-Serpent ground down upon it, their Ba-Serpent Formation began to creak and crack.

"Don't panic. This is the power of a formation-diagram of an Immortal sword; it only has the power to constrict and suppress. A single formation-diagram won't be able to do anything to the Ba-Serpent!" The leading white-haired man immediately sent mentally to the others.

.....

The outside world.

The Scion of the Blood God had been trapped within the formation. Although he could see the distant Immortal Diancai and Whitewater Hound, he wasn't able to draw any closer to them!"

"That whitewater hound is merely using the Fuxi Staff Formation; how is it that his formations are this powerful?! I've trained for hundreds of thousands of years, and I have some insight into the art of formations, but I haven't been able to find a single flaw in this formation at all." The Scion of the Blood God was completely stymied.

Right at this moment, the sound of massive explosions could be heard from afar.

The Scion turned to look in that direction. He could still see the giant Ba-Serpent in the outside world; he was simply unable to fly over there.

"The Ba-Serpent?"

“A river?”

Uncle White and Immortal Fivecraze turned to look as well.

From afar, a three kilometer Ba-Serpent had been completely swept up into an enormous, awe-inspiring river that was more than ten thousand kilometers long. The waters of the river were furiously churning around the body of the Ba-Serpent.

And then, the massive river began to rapidly shrink, from ten thousand kilometers to a hundred kilometers, then down to ten kilometers.

The ten kilometer river was now roughly comparable in size to the three kilometer Ba-Serpent. The power of the river grew as it shrank, and it continued to coil and churn around the Ba-Serpent. There was even water flowing in and out of the Ba-Serpent's body, nose, and mouth.

ROAR!!! The Ba-Serpent raised its head, letting out a furious growl as it twisted and turned, struggling to free itself. But the river didn't budge in the slightest.

.....

“Captain, the pressure from the waters of the river is too great, and it has covered every single part of the Ba-Serpent's body. We're using up far too much elemental ki in maintaining this Ba-Serpent Formation.”

“Captain, what should we do?”

They were beginning to grow nervous. Normally speaking, once a foe entered the body of the Ba-Serpent, there was no way the foe would be able to find the twelve of them. They could attack as they pleased at a close distance from the 'flesh' and 'bones' of the Ba-Serpent, with attacks that would be very difficult to defend against. Thus, the enemies would usually be quickly dominated and destroyed! However, despite being trapped within the Ba-Serpent, this Ji Ning actually had a method to deal with the entire creature at once!

“A formation-diagram? A formation-diagram?! Generally speaking, only Pure Yang treasures have formation-diagrams. Even if this Ji Ning does have a Pure Yang treasure...logically speaking, he has to be at the

Celestial Immortal level to use it. How could a formation-diagram have appeared?!” The captain was puzzled and frantic as well.

The Nightriver Painting of the past was something which required one to first draw the enemy into painting before being able to use the river to suppress and weaken the enemy.

However, after the countless years of refining by the spirit of the underwater estate, the Nightriver Painting had already become the formation-diagram of the Thousandbull Sword. Once the formation-diagram was activated, the Nightriver would instantly appear.

This was what made formation-diagrams so special! And this was also the reason why the Thousandbull Sword could be described as comparable to a Pure Yang treasure!

“This Ji Ning definitely has some sort of powerful treasure on him. However...following that principle, once we kill him, that treasure will become ours,” the captain sent mentally. “We must kill Ji Ning at all costs. Activate the forbidden technique!”

“The forbidden technique?”

“But...”

“Captain, do we really have to activate it?” These were Immortal cultivators, not Deathsworn; they naturally felt a degree of self-interest.

The captain shouted mentally towards them, “This treasure is capable of allowing a Void-level Earth Immortal to command the power of a formation-diagram, which means that it is no less valuable than a Pure Yang treasure in might! Ji Ning definitely has many treasures on him; once we acquire them, then hmph...all of us will benefit from it. Even if you suffer harm to your foundations, it will be worth it. Don’t hesitate; the more time we waste, the more elemental ki we will have wasted. If you continue to hesitate...don’t blame me for being merciless!”

“Fine. Let’s do this!”

“Kill Ji Ning!”

Upon hearing their captain's threat, they no longer hesitated. They simultaneously executed the forbidden technique.

The 'Ba-Serpent Formation' was an ancient, powerful formation which had been passed down by the Bloodcloud Hall that required twelve Immortals to execute. Aside from normal attacks, it also possessed three levels of forbidden techniques.

These three levels of techniques were extremely complicated; given the insights into the Dao which the members of squad 'Earthnine' possessed, only the activation of the first level was possible.

However, this first level already possessed nigh-limitless power.

The twelve white-robed men, hidden within the body of the Ba-Serpent, all used the same forbidden technique simultaneously. The runic formations that had been hovering in the air around them slowly began to turn a bloody color, and additional blood-colored runes began to appear as well. These bloody runes hung there in the air, and once the forbidden technique was activated...

"Ba-Serpent Hell – Godslayer!" The white-robed leader with the bloody scar let out a low growl, his voice echoing within every part of the Ba-Serpent's body.

All of the bloody light and the bloody runes began to suddenly move about at high speed. They flowed forth from those twelve locations within the Ba-Serpent, moving towards the direction of the Ba-Serpent's abdomen. Immediately afterwards, within the dark abyss of the abdomen of the Ba-Serpent, a region of blood suddenly appeared. The bloody light and the bloody runes all swirled around each other within this region.

Whoosh.

Ning's three-headed, six-armed form was gripping a total of six mighty swords as he strove to block the suddenly attacking magic treasures. "I have to come up with a way to flee from the Ba-Serpent's body. If I'm unable to escape...I'll be like fish meat on the chopping board."

"Eh? Why have the attacks stopped?" Ning found out to his amazement

that the weapons and arts that had been attacking him had suddenly disappeared.

But suddenly afterwards...the devouring force increased dramatically in power, and with a swoosh, Ning once more sank downwards.

Plonk. Ning fell straight into a bloody lake.

This was a lake of blood located within the abdomen of the Ba-Serpent. Above the lake of blood were bloody runic symbols which hovered and shimmered. Upon falling into the lake, Ning immediately struggled to try and fly out, but the sucking power of the lake was simply too great. Ning was firmly trapped within it, completely unable to escape. At the same time...Ning could sense a powerful corrosive force begin to be applied to every single part of his body.

“Captain, is Ji Ning dead?”

“This forbidden technique, ‘Ba-Serpent Hell’, has very powerful corrosive properties. Even ancient Void-level Fiendgods which are legendary for how powerful their bodies are will be corroded and dissolved, then perish. There’s no way this Ji Ning will be able to survive it.”

Chapter 19: A Spatial Tear

This time...they were ridiculously wrong!

By relying on this technique, they could indeed corrode and melt away even a Void-level fiendgod, and even ordinary Celestial Immortal Patriarchs would perish to this technique. Unfortunately...the person trapped within the Ba-Serpent Hell was Ji Ning. Ji Ning, who had reached the Third Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]! Ji Ning's flesh was comparable to Immortal-ranked magic treasures. Although their Ba-Serpent Hell technique was very corrosive, there was no way it could corrode Immortal-ranked magic treasures!

"I can't just let myself remain trapped in here. I have to get out." Ning executed the [Heavenly Transformations], causing his body to expand enormously. The bloody lake was now only able to reach Ning's kneecaps.

Six Immortal swords in his hands, Ning began to wildly and wantonly hack away at the stomach-walls of the Ba-Serpent.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The Ba-Serpent was trembling.

"This guy didn't die yet?"

"How can this be?"

"How could it be that the Ba-Serpent Hell is unable to kill him?!" The twelve were all stunned. They hurriedly sent out their divine senses to investigate, and as they did, they discovered...that there was an enormous three-headed, six-armed youth who was standing in the middle of the bloody lake, whose fur-clad body was glowing with a hazy golden light. The bloody lakewater was completely unable to harm him at all.

The giant was even wildly hacking away at the stomach-walls of the Ba-Serpent, each strike containing enormous power. Given that the surging waves of the Nightriver filled every part of the Ba-Serpent, crushing down upon it...the twelve white-robed figures were using up elemental ki at an enormously fast rate in order to maintain the Ba-Serpent.

“This kid has trained for less than a century; he’s merely a Void-level Earth Immortal. How is it possible that he can withstand the Ba-Serpent Hell?” None of them could believe it. This was something which they had executed only after paying a heavy price, damaging their Goldlotus Primals. They were confident that this would definitely succeed...but who would’ve expected that the end result would be failure?

“It must be that golden light on his body! That golden light...it must be the aura of a protective magic treasure. It’s precisely because of that magic treasure that he’s able to resist the Ba-Serpent Hell!”

“Right. He’s probably taken on a True Immortal or Empyrean God as his master; he must’ve been given a protective treasure.”

“That must be it.”

“Protective treasures won’t be able to be maintained for too long. After its energy is used up, this Ji Ning shall die for certain.”

Their level of experience was limited, after all; although they knew some of the powerful divine abilities of the Three Realms could allow one’s body to become comparable to magic treasures, Ji Ning was only at the fifteenth stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]. They felt that even if Ning trained in protective divine abilities such as the [Pentabolt Vajra], there was no way he could use them to resist their Ba-Serpent Hell.

Thus, they guessed that it must be a protective treasure.

A protective treasure bestowed by a True Immortal or Empyrean God... upon being activated, it could protect the bearer for a time, but once the energy and power within it was used up, it would become useless.

“But we are only going to be able to sustain the Ba-Serpent Hell via our forbidden technique for the time needed to boil a kettle of tea.”

“If the power of Ji Ning’s protective treasure is used up, then we’ll have won. But if the Ba-Serpent Hell is dispersed first...are we supposed to use the forbidden technique again?!”

“Captain, what should we do next?”

The others were all awaiting the captain's order. None of them wanted to use the forbidden technique again.

"Disciples with backers and sects behind him are always difficult," the white-robed man muttered back mentally. "There's nothing we can. Carry out the backup plan."

"Fine."

"Let's do it."

They all immediately acknowledged the order.

This 'backup plan' was to borrow strength from another party...but as a result, the rewards they would get for killing Ji Ning would have to be divided up as well.

.....

The Whitewater Hound used the Fuxi Staff Formation to tremendously powerful effect. The Ba-Serpent might be able to forcibly break through and threaten his formations, but the leader of the Blood God Church, the Scion of the Blood God, was hidden within that black warship; he wasn't willing to go all-out, and so he definitely wasn't able to break open the formation.

Uncle White and Immortal Fivecraze watched the outside world with worry.

High in the air, a giant river was twisting and coiling around an unfathomably powerful Ba-Serpent. The Ba-Serpent was struggling and roaring with rage.

"Break apart!" The Ba-Serpent spoke out in the human tongue, then let out another enraged roar as its tail struck out hard.

Rumble...

Space itself was torn apart, and on the other side a sea could vaguely be seen.

It must be understood that this minor world was very close to the Grand Xia major world. The entrance to the volcano was a stable corridor

between worlds, but some sufficiently powerful experts were absolutely capable of opening a corridor through their own power. For example, Patriarch Arcanum had done just that in ripping a tunnel into the world of the Witchriver Immortal Estate.

This strike by the Ba-Serpent was absolutely comparable to a blow from Patriarch Arcanum.

Swoosh. After ripping apart the fabric of space...although the Ba-Serpent remained entangled within the Nightriver, it charged into the spatial tear and returned to the world of the Grand Xia.

The minor world grew quiet.

“They are gone?”

“They disappeared?”

Uncle White and Immortal Fivecraze were all quite flabbergasted. They hadn’t expected that the enemy would tear open the fabric of space and depart from this minor world. They both looked with concern towards the black-robed Ning, who was fairly close to them. It must be understood that it was Ning’s true body that had just been taken away! His true body was far more important than his Primaltwin.

“Ji Ning,” Immortal Fivecraze said.

“No need to worry about me.” The black-robed Ning shook his head, then sat down in the lotus position, quietly protecting his master, Immortal Diancai.

No matter what, he absolutely wouldn’t permit anyone from disturbing his master’s tribulation. His Primaltwin had to stay here and protect his master! As for his true body...his true body had the underwater estate. If he truly did encounter a life-threatening situation, he could go ahead and hide into it, even though that meant revealing the existence of the estate. After all, his true body was very important; only his true body was capable of executing techniques such as the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] and the [Starseizing Hand].

The air above the Darknorth Sea.

The vast sea was incomparably quiet. From far away, one could see a ship advancing through the seas, a merchant vessel from a surrounding island.

Rumble...

The air above the sea split apart, and an enormous monstrosity came hurtling through the spatial tear.

It was an enormous serpent that was three thousand meters long. Its body was entangled by a surging river which coiled around it like a rope.

“What’s that?!”

“Good heavens!”

“A Diremonster?!”

The many mortals who were aboard that merchant vessel, as well as a few ‘powerful’ Xiantian experts, all stared in stupefaction. However, with but a single movement, that massive, three kilometer serpent disappeared into the horizon.

.....

Ning was able to clearly sense what was going on outside, thanks to the Nightriver which the Thousandbull Sword had created.

“Eh? We’re at the world of the Grand Xia? And this should be the Darknorth Sea,” Ning guessed to himself. At the same time, he continued to wildly brandish his six swords, hacking and slashing at the stomach of the Ba-Serpent. The Ba-Serpent trembled repeatedly as the elemental ki of the twelve white-robed figures was used up at a rapid pace. They were forced to take out some spirit-pills and swallow them to replenish their energy.

Swoosh. The Ba-Serpent easily used a spatial teleportation, arriving at the air above a wide mountain range located within the vast continent of the Grand Xia Dynasty.

“A mountain range? This is the place the Ba-Serpent’s spatial teleportation took it to?” Ning mused to himself, still trapped within the

Ba-Serpent's body.

Instantly, the incomparably imposing waters of the Nightriver began to expand wildly, from ten kilometers to its normal ten thousand kilometer size! The endless amounts of river water instantly filled the mountain range below. However, Ning remained quite careful; he didn't wish to let the waters of the Nightriver harm any mortals by accident. He mainly wanted to test the surrounding environment.

"Formations!" Ning was shocked by what he discovered. A fog had instantly appeared within the great mountain range, completely ensconcing the Nightriver within it.

"Not good. We're trapped within a formation. My ten thousand kilometer Nightriver is only able to test a small portion of this formation; clearly, this is an absolutely enormous formation. It seems this mountain range must be a secret base." Ning realized that this must be a place like his own homeland, Swallow Mountain, which was now protected by layers of grand formations.

Powers such as the Skysplitter Sword Sect, for example, all had many great formations protecting their headquarters. It was the same principle.

The mountain range which this Ba-Serpent had descended into was assuredly a similarly dangerous place.

.....

Grand Xia Dynasty. Flamedoor Commandery. The Eastwoods mountain range.

The Eastwoods mountain range was the location of a sect known as the Eastwoods Sect!

"General." The leader of the Eastwoods Sect spoke with incomparable respect. "A Ba-Serpent has suddenly appeared within the Eastwoods mountain range, and around it is a river that is ten thousand kilometers long. It is extremely powerful. Are these the people from Bloodcloud Hall which you previously mentioned, general?"

At the front of the hall was seated a tall, muscular, handsome, silver-

armored youth. The silver-armored youth's aura was very powerful, at the Celestial Immortal level.

"It seems those useless pieces of crap at Bloodcloud Hall were unable to kill Ji Ning, so they brought him here to my place," the silver-armored youth laughed disdainfully. "They weren't even able to kill a kid like Ji Ning, who has trained for less than a century. How embarrassing! Mm... sect leader of the Eastwoods Sect, this is your territory. You go ahead and control the grand formation to help the Ba-Serpent and deal with Ji Ning."

The sect leader of the Eastwoods Sect said respectfully, "Yes, General."

In his heart, however, he was sighing. He was the sect leader of a supreme sect, but over the course of a single night thirty years ago, the entire Eastwoods Sect had become completely 'brainwashed'. Even he himself was sealed with a Reincarnation Seal and forced to become an obedient servant.

"Big Han," the silver-armored youth suddenly called out.

Whoosh.

A shadow materialized within the darkness; it was a a man with sideburns. He said with tremendous respect, "Master."

The silver-armored youth said, "Bloodcloud Hall sent people to assassinate Ji Ning. They agreed with me before doing so that if they were unable to do anything to Ji Ning, that they would come here to the Eastwoods mountain range...and just a short while ago, the forces of Bloodcloud Hall used their 'Ba-Serpent Formation' to bring Ji Ning here. Accompany the sect leader of the Eastwoods Sect; when the time comes, you can act to help."

"Yes," the sideburned middle-aged man said with respect.

"Mm. I'm going to go take a look in the 'forbidden area'. If there's nothing critical, don't bother me," the silver-armored youth instructed.

"Yes," the sideburned man repeated once more.

The leader of the Eastwoods Sect assented as well, but in his heart he

felt puzzled. Ever since this mysterious power had descended thirty-plus years ago and took over the entire Eastwoods Sect, they had first set down increasingly, terrifyingly powerful formations around the mountains, then had designated one particular region within it as a 'forbidden region'. The original members of the Eastwoods Sect were completely forbidden from entering the region; if they did, they would definitely die!

Only the silver-armored general and his subordinates were able to enter that place. As for what was within it? Not even the leader of the Eastwoods Sect knew.

Rumble...

The flows of the distant Nightriver were still furiously smashing downwards, crushing some nearby mountains and shattering giant trees. The Ba-Serpent continued to struggle to escape from the confines of the Nightriver.

"Come with me, leader of the Eastwoods Sect." The face of the sideburned man changed, and he let out a sharp bark as he led the leader of the Eastwoods Sect away to go help the forces of Bloodcloud Hall.

The silver-armored general stared towards the distance, then shook his head. "This Ji Ning is actually this hard to kill...he truly lives up to his reputation as the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny." He took a single step forward, then vanished. He was going to the forbidden region.

Chapter 20: Trapped

The sideburned man and the leader of the Eastwoods Sect moved as fast as lightning. They soon arrived at the place where the Ba-Serpent was located.

“Uh...”

The sideburned man sighed in amazement at what he saw. The massive, ten thousand kilometer river seemed to be like a living creature. It struck out with wanton abandon; how could the local mountain peaks, gorges, and trees possibly withstand its strikes? They were all instantly shattered and broken apart. As for the Ba-Serpent that was trapped within the massive river, it appeared to be even less restrained; clearly, the river was only able to somewhat bind its power.

“Earthnine, do you need my help?” The sideburned man called out loudly. Filled with elemental ki, his voice echoed within the heavens.

“Activate the formation. Don’t let Ji Ning escape,” the massive Ba-Serpent roared furiously.

“Don’t worry!” The sideburned man chortled merrily, then glanced sideways at the leader of the Eastwoods Sect. “No problem handling a small request like this, right?”

“Rest your mind, milord,” the leader of the Eastwood Sect said respectfully.

The distant Ba-Serpent suddenly opened its giant bloody maw. Rumble... a human-shaped figure was suddenly spat out from within it. It was a three-headed, six-armed youth.

Ji Ning did a somersault in midair, then stood there in the sky, six swords in his six arms. Laughing loudly, he said, “It seems this is all you are capable of. Earlier, you were bragging about how even Celestial Immortal Patriarchs would die when trapped...but didn’t I come out in perfectly fine shape?”

.....

As soon as he came out, Ning noticed the formations in the surrounding area. Formations were everywhere, making it difficult for even his divine sense to search the area.

“[Torch-Dragon’s Eye].” Ning’s eyes began to glow with torch-light. He stared at the surrounding area, only to discover that he could still only see to a distance of a thousand kilometers. This was because of the fog in the area blocking much of the light; even the [Torch-Dragon’s Eye] was only able to penetrate to a certain extent through the fog. If he didn’t have this divine ability...he’d probably only be able to see to a distance of one kilometer.

Whoosh...

The Ba-Serpent hung in the air in the distance, its golden eyes focused on Ning. It spoke in the human tongue: “Ji Ning, today you shall most certainly die.”

“You shouldn’t talk so big,” Ning smirked.

“You are trapped within our formations; are you going to be able to escape?” The Ba-Serpent growled, “Even if you have a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal...once we join forces, you can forget about teleporting away.”

Ning stood there in midair, pondering. Dao-seals and magic treasures weren’t absolutely failproof. Lesser Teleportation Dao-seals were precious protective treasures for Xiantian lifeforms and Zifu Disciples, but if combat caused the surrounding space to be disturbed or locked when one attempted to use them, then there would be no way the Lesser Teleportation Dao-seals could be activated.

The same principle applied to Greater Teleportation Dao-seals as well; they, too, had their limits!

Greater Teleportation Dao-seals were indeed powerful, and they even allowed one to teleport from one world to another. However...the process of actually activating the Dao-seal and releasing the power within it involved the person merging with space itself. If one suffered an extremely powerful attack that disrupted the energy of the Dao-seal, then

the Greater Teleportation would be disrupted and unable to complete!

A Dao-seal could ignore a weak disruption attempt, such as those from ordinary Primal Daoists or Loose Immortals. Thus, for Primal Daoists and Void-level Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals, these Greater Teleportation Dao-seals were extremely valuable protective treasures.

But a powerful disruption attempt would render Greater Teleportation impossible. At the Celestial Immortal level, their attacks were more than enough to disrupt the energy of a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal.

As for True Immortals and Empyrean Gods, they were able to completely disintegrate a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal!

Daofathers? Such seals were nothing more than a joke in the face of a Daofather's might.

.....

When Ning had been within the Ba-Serpent, he had been suffering attacks nonstop. And the attacks of these foes were all at the Celestial Immortal level! They were more than enough to disrupt a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal.

"If they push me too far, I'll just go hide inside my Immortal estate. Although the defensive power of the mobile one I carry with me isn't that strong, it's still enough to withstand their attacks for a brief moment. That will be more than enough for me to use a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal to escape! However...that's as good as throwing away my mobile Immortal estate." Ning felt his heart ache.

This Immortal estate had been given to him as a gift by the giant yellow bear! It was used to hide his underwater estate. In terms of price, it was on a slightly higher level than even the Goldlight Immortal Estate which he had given his cousin. It was most likely worth five million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence or more!

In order to flee, Ning would have to sacrifice both a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal and his mobile estate. Unless absolutely necessary, he wouldn't choose to do this.

“Old Han, why haven’t you activated the formation to attack Ji Ning yet?” The Ba-Serpent roared angrily. “He has a protective treasure on him, but after its energy is used up...I want to see how much longer he’ll be able to hold on after that!”

“Hahaha, fine.”

Big Han, who had been watching from afar, laughed and assented. He instructed the nearby Eastwoods sect leader, “Go ahead. Bring out everything you have; broaden the horizons of those useless pieces of crap from Bloodcloud Hall.”

“Yes,” the Eastwoods sect leader said respectfully.

This mountain range was the headquarters of the Eastwoods Sect; it naturally was protected by many layers of powerful formations. As the sect leader, he was capable of actively unleashing their power! However, he didn’t know anything about the even more powerful formations which the silver-armored general, that Celestial Immortal, had laid down.

Generally speaking, the original formations of the Eastwoods Sect were more than enough.

“Divine Ashfire!” The Eastwoods sect leader immediately brought out one of the most powerful techniques of his sect.

Instantly, a grand formation that was tens of thousands of kilometers in size began to activate the natural energy of the world. A large amount of fire elemental energy began to gather, circulating through the formation and becoming transformed in midair to dull red tendrils of flame that seemed ready to go out at any moment. The dull red tendrils of flame began to appear everywhere, quickly forming an enormous firebird.

Whoosh!

The three hundred meter tall dull red firebird flew straight towards Ning. “Roaaaar!” The Ba-Serpent charged once more towards Ning as well, howling madly. The power of its tail was quite astonishing, and multiple Immortal-ranked magic treasures came flying out as well as some powerful techniques, all of which were aimed towards Ning.

“Ji Ning, the power of this Divine Ashfire is quite formidable; not even Celestial Immortals dare to take it head-on. Even if you have a protective treasure on you...how long will you be able to hold on for? After its energy is used up, you will die.” The Ba-Serpent continued to attack while spitting out words in the human tongue, seeking to disturb Ning’s concentration.

“Bring everything you have. Do you think this ‘Divine Ashfire’ will be able to do anything to me?” Ning stood there in midair, not caring at all.

When the dull red firebird drew near, a large amount of fire quickly swept forward to envelop Ning.

The Divine Ashfire technique was mainly dangerous for Ki Refiners. It might pose a threat to some Fiendgods that had weak defenses, and might be able to burn apart Earth-ranked magic treasures...but upon encountering Heaven-ranked magic treasures, it would begin to find breaking through to be onerous. At most, it would be able to damage an ordinary low-grade Heaven-ranked magic treasure. As for higher quality Heaven-ranked treasures, they were able to ignore the power of the Ashfire. As for a Fiendgod Body Refiner like Ning?

“Hahaha...” Ning laughed, his body once more emanating with that hazy golden light.

In truth, Ning was intentionally releasing that golden light from his body. He wanted the foe to think that he had some sort of protective treasure on him, so as to conceal the fact that he had trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. Although it would definitely be revealed at some point as they continued to fight...if the enemy was to misjudge his true strength, then he would have an opportunity to take advantage of that and perhaps wipe them out at one go!

.....

The Divine Ashfire blazed against him, and the massive Ba-Serpent struck at him repeatedly. Multiple Immortal-ranked magic treasures came crashing down upon him with the weight of mountains, and techniques in the shape of dragonsnakes, massive trees, and more also

came hammering towards him. There was even skyfire and other techniques aimed his way! All of these attacks came flying towards Ning.

Ning caused the waters of the Nightriver to billow in every direction, suppressing and slowing down everything. At the same time, he sent his sword-light flying everywhere, knocking aside each attacking treasure in a truly valiant manner.

“Strange.”

“I’ve nearly exhausted my elemental ki twice, and I’ve eaten quite a few spirit-pills. How is this Ji Ning still able to hold on?”

“How is it that he’s been able to keep his protective treasure active this entire time? The energy of protective treasures generally come from True Immortals or Empyrean Gods filling the treasure with their own power; once the power is gone, the treasure is useless. How is it able to hold on for so long?”

.....

Big Han, watching the battle from far away, began to frown. “I believe your Eastwoods Sect has a ‘Seven Supreme Thunders’ formation, yes? Hurry up and activate it.”

The Eastwoods sect leader hurriedly said, “Yes.”

Instantly, a dark cloud appeared in the skies above the grand formation. Lightning appeared within the dark clouds, and bolts of lightning came hammering down, all striking towards Ning.

“Hahaha, these lightning bolts aren’t even enough to tickle me.” The three-headed, six-armed Ning stood there in midair, the waters of the mighty Nightriver surrounding him, the dull red flames blazing against him, bolts of lightning crashing down up him, the Ba-Serpent striking at him, and magic treasures swirling around him...but like Lord Buddha himself, Ning just stood there, his entire body glowing with golden light. His sword-light flashed everywhere, easily deflecting all of the oncoming attacks.

Seeing this, Big Han frowned. “This is trouble.”

“Is that all you have? Aren’t you guys always quite cocky in front of us, in front of Bloodcloud Hall? Why is it that you are completely useless right now?” The distant Ba-Serpent, growing frustrated, shouted angrily in the human tongue.

“Hmph.” Big Han gritted his teeth, then waved his arm. A strange golem appeared next to him, a golem that looked like a cat. Its body was feline, but it had three tails and just a single eye. This golem had a total of four legs, was thirty meters long, and there was actually an opening on its back. The sideburned ‘Big Han’ flew straight into the golem, and then with a clanking sound, the opening on the back became completely sealed.

This construct was similar to a ship, but it could be used to attack as well as defense. It was an incomparably precious golem.

“I refuse to believe a little brat that’s trained for less than a century can really be this tough.” The ‘Threetailed Thundergod’ construct let out a furious roar, then transformed into a streak of lightning that flew straight towards the distant Ning.

.....

Ning noticed the jagged bolt of lightning that was flying towards him from afar. His eyes were filled with blazing torch-light, and he instantly could tell that this was a strange construct of some sort. “It seems quite powerful; a construct of such power is rarely seen even in the Black-White College. I didn’t expect to encounter such a formidable construct in a place like this.”

“Still...although it’s powerful, it’s not a match for me.” To ‘greet’ this new opponent, Ning used the most powerful of his six swords, the Thousandbull Sword, to ‘welcome’ it to the fray.

“Die!” The Threetailed Thundergod construct slashed out with its sharp claws, its blow seeming to carry enormous power. Its knife-sharp claws moved lightning-fast as he clawed towards Ning. Where the claws passed, space itself split apart.

A streak of sword-light in the shape of a divine black dragon howled

forth to meet the sharp claws.

Rumble...

The Threetailed Thundergod was knocked flying backwards. Only a few moments later did he manage to come to a halt. Then, with an enraged roar, it once more charged forward to attack.

No matter how wildly they all attacked, and despite the fact that Ning had only six arms to counter their tens of hands, resulting in an occasional attack striking him...his Fiendgod body, covered by that blurry golden light, was able to easily withstand all assaults without being damaged in the slightest. This caused the enemies to feel that Ning's protective treasure was truly something remarkable.

"Big Han, stop fighting so madly. This Ji Ning has plenty of tricks up his sleeve; there's nothing we can do to him at all. Hurry up and find your master! Let him come up with a solution. If even if he has nothing, then Bloodcloud Hall will be forced to resort to our final option, regardless of whether or not it succeeds," the scarred white-robed leader within the Ba-Serpent sent mentally.

"Fine. I'll notify my master," Big Han immediately sent back.

Chapter 21: The Cauldron of Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens

Ji Ning, protected by the Nightriver, was being attacked from every corner. But suddenly, the 'Threetailed Thundergod' construct turned tail and flew away.

"You want to go?" Ning's eyes blazed with torch-light. He immediately executed the [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens] divine ability. Although he had acquired it just recently, it was a technique-focused divine ability. In addition, Ning had already thoroughly mastered the Windwing Evasion, and thus he was quick to master part of the mysteries of this [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens] technique. It could be said that he had gained a basic level of skill in it.

When this divine ability was executed, a wild wind began to howl around Ning as he chased after the construct.

"Construct, you want to leave?" The six Immortal swords in Ning's hands repeatedly hacked down towards the fleeing construct.

One ray of sword-light after another came crashing down upon the body of the construct.

BOOM!!!!

The construct was slammed into the ground, and a spiderweb of cracks appeared in the ground beneath it.

"Earthnine, you useless pieces of crap, hurry up and help me stop Ji Ning. If you don't stop him, I won't be able to leave. How the hell am I supposed to inform Master?" Big Han sent a frantic mental message while muttering to himself, "This Ji Ning is way too fast. I was quite some distance away from him, but he was able to catch up in a flash."

Squad Earthnine was also shocked by Ning's speed. Still, they immediately moved to help. The enormous body of the Ba-Serpent came slithering over, coiling around Ning as multiple magic treasures began to assault him as well. As it did, the Ba-Serpent roared back, "You're the

useless piece of crap! Do you think it's easy to deal with this Ji Ning? It's not that we are weak, it's that he's too much of a monster. I have no idea what sort of treasure is generating that golden light, but no matter how we attack him, we aren't able to do anything to him."

Big Han seized this moment to hurry and flee. In truth, he knew that squad Earthnine wasn't to blame; he had used his construct to launch attacks earlier, and he knew that Ji Ning truly was a monster.

Ning was like a rock, a hard bone that wouldn't break or crack. What was one supposed to do to him?

.....

Whoosh.

After fleeing far away, Big Han was able to escape the field of battle, thanks to the obscuring fog in the area.

"Milord." The leader of the Eastwoods sect came to greet him.

"I'm going to go see the general. You watch here. Don't let Ji Ning escape," Big Han instructed.

"Alright," the Eastwoods sect leader said respectfully.

Big Han quickly departed, and the Eastwoods sect leader watched as Big Han disappeared into the distance. Only after he was gone did the sect leader mumble to himself, "So what if I don't let him leave? None of you were able to do anything to him when attacking him." He then lifted his head to once more stare at the besieged, three-headed, six-armed Ning. He couldn't help but feel admiration for him.

This was a monster who had shocked the world more than thirty years ago, seizing the championship of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny. And now...he was truly formidable. Even squad Earthnine of Bloodcloud Hall was unable to harm him in the slightest.

The Eastwoods mountain range. The forbidden area.

Within a dark palace.

The silver-armored youth was seated in the host's position, sampling

fine wine. Before him was seated a red-robed elder.

“I’m almost out of patience. Qu Huan, you truly have disappointed me greatly,” the silver-armored youth said, a beaustskull goblet of wine in hand. He stared at the wind as he said these words calmly.

“General, don’t be impatient. Don’t be impatient,” the red-robed elder said hurriedly with an ingratiating smile.

“I’m not impatient, but the Master is!” The silver-armored youth said coldly, then raised his head to glance sideways at the red-robed elder. “You should know very well how important your mission is. You’ve spent more than ten years on it...how much longer before you complete it?”

The red-robed elder said hurriedly, “We’re already doing everything we can. If you send some more people to help us out, General, we might be able to go a bit faster.”

“More people?” The silver-armored youth shook his head. “Everyone is tight on personnel right now. The other generals all have their own assignments to carry out as well; where am I supposed to go find more people? The Master has already begun to push me. I’ll give you three more years. If you aren’t able to finish within three years...I won’t kill you myself, but you need to make your preparations for reincarnation.”

The red-robed elder was filled with worry. He hurriedly said, “It’s not enough. How can three years be enough? Given the number of people we have...we will need at least five years.”

“You must finish within three years. If you do not...” The silver-armored youth waved his hand. “Hurry up and beat it.”

“Yes.” The red-robed elder gritted his teeth. “Your subordinate shall definitely do everything possible to finish within three years.” He then left obediently.

The palace hall once more turned quiet.

The silver-armored youth drank some more wine, then shook his head helplessly. “Ever since I came to this major world of the Grand Xia, I’ve been living the life of a mouse. I’m always hiding. How irritating! I

wonder when the battle will come. After taking over this major world, I'll be able to live a carefree life."

Suddenly...

"Master, Master." A voice shouted from outside.

The silver-armored youth frowned, then barked, "Have you no sense of propriety? Stop screaming and kicking up a fuss."

"Master." Big Han came in, then hurriedly smiled, "Sorry, I was panicking."

"What is it?" The silver-armored youth said.

"I went along with the Eastwoods sect leader to help out, and we used the protective formations the Eastwoods Sect has. I even personally intervened, but we weren't able to do anything to that Ji Ning," Big Han said hurriedly. "Squad Earthnine have no other options left. They are asking for your help, Master. If you are helpless as well, then they'll prepare for their 'final option'."

"Final option?" The silver-armored youth snickered, "Those useless pieces of crap from Bloodcloud Hall. Whenever they fail in their assassination attempt, they'll use that so-called 'final option'."

"But that option has killed quite a few Celestial Immortals," Big Han couldn't help but say.

"Those Celestial Immortals died due to stupidity!" The silver-armored youth shook his head. "No matter what...squad Earthnine of Bloodcloud Hall has always been on quite good terms with me. I'll give them a hand. Go and summon nine of my Fiendguards and prepare to use the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens Cauldron. If they can kill Ji Ning, that will naturally be a joyous affair, but if even this technique fails to kill him...then have squad Earthnine come up with another method. If they want to use their so-called 'final option', that's up to them."

"Alright," Big Han said in a low voice, "But Master, aren't you going to fight?"

“Me? Fight? Do you think it was easy for me to make it past all the tribulations and calamities, eventually becoming a Celestial Immortal? If a Celestial Immortal wants to stay alive for a long period of time, he needs to have a bit of judgment. He needs to clearly understand when to act and when not to act.” The silver-armored youth snickered, “This Ji Ning might have a True Immortal or Empyrean God behind him, or perhaps even a Daofather! If I were to personally intervene, what if the power behind Ji Ning were to come out and instantly crushing me to death. Wouldn’t that be a shame?”

“Now, of course, if I was given a good enough offer, I might be willing to risk it...but this mission only involves three piddling top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures. The main Bloodcloud Hall office is keeping one of them, while squad Earthnine is taking part as well. How much can there be for me? They want me to take on such risks for just a tiny reward?”

The silver-armored youth shook his head disdainfully. “Big Han, you and the rest of the old brothers who accompanied me to the world of the Grand Xia for the purpose of enjoying ourselves. Naturally, when we need to fight, we shall...but we need to always consider whether it is worth it or not. As for this assassination mission of Bloodcloud Hall? Its success, its failure...what the hell does it have to do with us?”

“Right, right, right.” Big Han hurriedly said, “Master, you are wise.”

“The Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens Cauldron is the most powerful killing formation which has been set down here at the Eastwoods mountain range. Even amongst Celestial Immortals, only extremely powerful ones can withstand it. The vast majority will be annihilated in one blow,” the silver-armored youth said. “I’m giving them face by having nine of my Fiendguards activate this killing formation. Alright, hurry up and go.”

“Yes, yes, yes.” Big Han hurriedly left.

The silver-armored youth immediately stood up and walked outside of the palace hall. Soon, Big Han came back leading nine plainly dressed

bronze-armored Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals.

“General,” the nine Fiendguards said respectfully.

“Big Han has told you everything, yes? Hurry up and go control the formation to kill Ji Ning,” the silver-armored youth instructed.

“Yes, General.” The nine Fiendguards assented respectfully, then quickly departed.

“Come, let’s go take a look as well. I want to see if this peerless genius of the Grand Xia world is able to survive within this grand formation of mine, or if he will be burnt to ash.” The silver-armored youth leisurely walked out.

.....

There were three figures atop a mountain peak. They were the silver-armored youth, big Han, and a black-robed youngster.

“Disciple, you came with me, your master, to the world of the Grand Xia,” the silver-armored youth said with a laugh. “Today, Master is going to give you the chance to see...the person known as the number one peerless genius of the world of the Grand Xia. He’s trained for less than a century, roughly the same as you, but he is far more famous than you.”

The black-haired youngster said confidently, “How strong can he be?”

“You’ll know soon enough,” the silver-armored youth said.

Swoosh.

A figure suddenly flew over. It was the Eastwoods sect leader. He said respectfully, “I greet you, General.”

“Disperse the fog,” the silver-armored youth said with a laugh. “Let my disciple have a chance to see how powerful this Ji Ning is.”

“Yes.” The sect leader immediately obeyed the order. Instantly, the distant fog began to dissipate, allowing everything to become clearly visible. Even here, at the distant mountain peak, one could see an enormous three-headed, six-armed giant battling in the distance against the even more massive Ba-Serpent, as well as the surging waters of the

Nightriver.

The silver-armored youth laughed. "Disciple, what do you think?"

The black-robed youngster stared intently into the distance. He could sense the terrifying power of the Ba-Serpent, capable of shaking the world itself, as well as the power of those many Immortal-ranked magic treasures. However...the three-headed, six-armed giant youth was able to block all of these attacks.

"So powerful." The black-robed youngster was somewhat stunned. "He... can it be that he is already a Celestial Immortal?"

"Although he is not a Celestial Immortal, he has a Celestial Immortal's power," the silver-armored youth said with a sigh. "At the Wanxiang level or the Primal level, fighting someone of a higher level is fairly common... but the difference between a Void-level Earth Immortal and a Celestial Immortal is absolutely enormous. For him to still be able to fight those at a higher level, despite being an Earth Immortal...is something that is truly rare. More importantly, this Ji Ning has trained for less than a century. Disciple...do you see the difference, now?"

The black-robed youngster gnawed at his lips as he watched.

Right at this moment...

Rumble...suddenly, a mountain peak began to levitate into the skies at the southeastern horizons.

Rumble...suddenly, a second mountain peak began to levitate into the skies of the northwestern horizons.

One mountain after another began to levitate into the air. Fortunately, thanks to the grand formation protecting the entire Eastwoods mountain range, those who were outside the mountain range were completely unable to see this. They had no idea how vicious the battle within the mountains had grown.

Soon, a total of nine mountain peaks were hovering in the air, spread out in every direction. Each mountain peak was covered with swirling, fiery red runes, causing the aura of power emanating from the mountains

to slowly grow more and more powerful.

This invisible aura quickly encompassed nearly the entire Eastwoods mountain range.

This was because this was the most powerful killing formation available to the Eastwoods Sect, capable of attacking any place within the mountain ranges. Even this mountain peak, where the black-robed youngster and the silver-armored youth were located, could be assaulted.

“Master, this killing formation...” The black-robed youngster’s face changed as he sensed the threat from this formation. “This formation is going to be used against Ji Ning?”

The aura from the formation alone was enough to cause the black-robed youngster to feel fear in his heart.

He knew exactly how powerful this killing formation was. Just a tiny portion of it was enough to annihilate him.

Chapter 22: The Curtain Call?

Ji Ning stood there in midair, commanding the flows of his Nightriver.

“Eh?” Ning’s face suddenly changed. He saw mountain peaks begin to levitate into the air in every direction. A total of nine mountains levitated upwards, each one covered with colossal, fiery red runes. Ning’s pupils contracted as he stared at them. “Using mountain peaks as formation-foundations...refining entire mountains into magic treasures...then joining them together into a formation?”

Ning wasn’t completely ignorant of formations. He understood them, and he knew that given how much effort had gone into this formation, this one was definitely an absolutely top-notch formation. Perhaps it was slightly weaker than the supremely ferocious killing formations of Swallow Mountain, but it was still most likely capable of threatening the lives of Celestial Immortals. As to exactly how strong it was...he would only know when he personally experienced it.

“Where did these assassins come from, for them to possess such powerful tools?” Ning still had no idea who exactly was trying to kill him.

He had some suspicions, but he wasn’t completely confident.

Whooooosh.

The nine levitating mountains that lined the horizons were suddenly connected by a streak of runic light. It was as though chain links were joining the mountain peaks together. Soon, the countless fiery runes began to flow together into a cycle, causing the nine mountain peaks to join together into one.

Swoosh.

The Ba-Serpent, which had been battling against Ning this entire time, suddenly retreated and attempted to flee.

“You want to leave?” Ning, who had been battling in close combat against the Ba-Serpent for quite some time now, immediately let out a loud roar. “If I’m going to be attacked by this formation, then you can

forget about leaving!” Ning immediately used the [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens], moving at a much faster speed and instantly catching up to the Ba-Serpent. Ning immediately transformed into a three hundred meter tall giant, then plopped his butt down directly down onto the body of Ba-Serpent while grabbing onto its body.

No matter how the Ba-Serpent tried to struggle, and no matter how it tried to swing its tail, Ning kept a firm lock on it.

“If this grand formation is going to attack me, then I insist on us getting a taste of it together.” Ning roared loudly with arrogant laughter, his hair wild and unbound.

“This is troublesome.”

“Captain, this Ji Ning is too fast; the Ba-Serpent isn’t able to shake him off. He’s now seated firmly atop the Ba-Serpent’s body. When the formation attacks, we’ll probably be hit as well.”

“This killing formation the Eastwoods Sect is using is the ‘Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens Cauldron’; there’s no way we can withstand that.”

“Don’t panic. The general won’t act recklessly; he’ll definitely perfectly control the Cauldron and focus its power on Ji Ning. Just a small amount might end up hitting the Ba-Serpent,” the captain sent back.

Just as the members of Bloodcloud Hall were chatting amongst themselves, a vortex of flame began to appear in the air.

This flame was composed of two different colors. The flames were jade-green in color, but at the center was a violet flame!

Rumble...the flames continuously swirled, and the more they swirled, the more enormous they became. Soon, they reached the maximum size that could be supported by this formation, having become an enormous, mountain-sized conflagration. Crackling sounds could be heard within this conflagration; the sound came from the violet flames in the center, where flashing lightning could be seen.

Ning rode atop the Ba-Serpent, controlling the river while doing so. He

raised his head. “So it is the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens...”

He was of the Mount Innerheart League, after all; after having spent so much time on the mountain, he had naturally reviewed all of the publicly available ‘common knowledge’. He knew what the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens was...it was a type of fire that was on the level of ‘truefire’ in terms of power. However...because it was too evil and chaotic, mixing too many different types of energy, there was no way an Immortal could nurture and cultivate this sort of fire within the body.

BOOM!!!!

The mountain-sized conflagration began to crash downwards.

The Ba-Serpent struggled frantically, but Ning rode atop the Ba-Serpent’s back, not letting it escape at all.

Whoosh...

The flames of the conflagration completely enveloped Ning. However, the flames were extremely agile; under the control of the nine Fiendguards, they only surrounded Ning, allowing the Ba-Serpent to escape virtually unscathed. But of course, Ning was striving against the Ba-Serpent, trying to pull it into contact with the flames.

“Hahaha, this Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens is quite hot, quite scorching. It feels just like taking a nice, warm bath in hot water.” Ning, bathed in flames, looked just like a Fiendgod. Roaring with laughter, the Ba-Serpent still in his clutches, he said, “Come, come, come, let’s bathe together!”

“What?!”

“How can this be?!”

“But, but...”

Both the forces of Bloodcloud Hall and the silver-armored general were all completely stupefied.

The silver-armored general was truly stunned. “He is actually using his body to resist it...he didn’t dodge or hide into his Immortal estate?” He

had thought that Ning would hide within his Immortal estate; upon Ning doing so, Bloodcloud Hall's forces would instantly tear apart space, immediately delivering it to a rather 'dangerous location'. Within the Three Realms, there were naturally some extremely terrifying places; thus, after hiding into a mobile Immortal estate, one had to immediately use a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal. Otherwise, once one was shoved into one of the danger zones of the Three Realms, one would almost assuredly perish.

"Not even the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens can harm him?" The nearby black-robed youngster was stunned as well. "How can this be? That's the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens!"

"Why can't it be?" The silver-armored youth said in a low voice, "Don't you see it happening before your very eyes?"

The nearby Big Han and the Eastwoods sect leader were both similarly stunned.

The Eastwoods sect leader gave an envious glance towards Ji Ning, who appeared like one of the invincible Fiendgods of legend. To him, both the Ba-Serpent and the terrifying Venomflame both seemed like naught but toys; they weren't able to do anything to him.

"Is it a protective treasure? Or a protective divine ability?" The silver-armored youth stared into the flames, towards Ning, who was covered by faint golden light. "It is almost inconceivable for a protective item to be able to last for this long...but then again, perhaps a Daofather has given him a particularly unique treasure. But if he's using a divine ability...I imagine the only possibility is the legendary [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]."

"If it's the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]...the implications are terrifying. Only very, very few True Gods and Daofathers of the Three Realms possess it...and they will generally only transmit it to their personal disciples." The silver-armored youth was secretly rather shocked.

Within the Three Realms, the True Gods and Daofathers were all scattered into various regions where they ruled like local hegemonies. But even amongst their ranks, only very, very few were in possession of the

[Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. The vast majority of True Gods and Daofathers, such as Grand Emperor Xuanwu or Daofather Crimsonbright, simply didn't have the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], much less teach it to disciples. Thus, very few individuals in the Three Realms were in possession of this divine ability.

Only a personal disciple of a supreme Daofather could possibly possess this divine ability!

"Even if it is 'just' a protective treasure...someone capable of giving away a marvelous treasure such as this must have a terrifyingly great background," the silver-armored youth mused to himself.

"Fiendguards, since you are unable to injure Ji Ning, then go ahead and disperse the Venomflame!" The silver-armored youth immediately sent the mental order.

"Yes." The nine Fiendguards instantly assented to the order.

Right away, the nine mountains that were hovering in the skies began to call back their runes as they began to sink downwards to their original location.

"Earthnine," the silver-armored youth sent mentally.

"General," Earthnine sent back.

"Even this killing formation of mine is unable to do anything to Ji Ning. I'm giving up. As to whatever Bloodcloud Hall plans to do, I can't be bothered to interfere," the silver-armored youth sent.

Earthnine immediately sent back, "Understood. This mission is nowhere close to being worth a mere three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures. Even ten wouldn't be enough. I won't bother you with this matter anymore, General. I have no other choices left, just the final option."

"Mm." The silver-armored youth assented.

.....

Ning rode atop the body of the Ba-Serpent, watching as the Divine

Venomflames of the Nine Heavens dissipated. He couldn't help but laugh; he knew long ago how powerful the flames were, and knew that his physical body was absolutely capable of ignoring those flames.

"Tell me, who are you people? Who told you to come assassinate me?" Ning barked. "If you tell me, I'll release you. Otherwise...I'll keep messing around with you. Although it's hard for me to escape this formation, you'll be trapped here alongside me."

"Ji Ning, I admit that you are formidable, but...threaten us? Hmph!"

The Ba-Serpent spoke out in the human tongue, then suddenly flew off into the distance.

Ning rode atop the body of the Ba-Serpent, following its movements.

Trapped within this formation, Ning would probably have to rely on a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal to escape. However, if he kept a firm grip on the Ba-Serpent...unless the Ba-Serpent was willing to remain within the formation as well, once it left, Ning would be able to go out with it. This was the reason why Ning kept such a firm grip on the serpent.

Whoosh. The Ba-Serpent flew forward, flying through mountain forests as many formations automatically parted before it.

Suddenly...

BANG!

The massive Ba-Serpent suddenly disappeared into nowhere as the twelve white-robed figures re-appeared. The leader, the white-robed man with a bloody scar, waved his hand to collect all of the other eleven, then immediately flew towards a nearby location in front of him, his movements lightning-fast. On the ground in front of him, there was a pitch-black, fog-covered cave.

Swoosh!

When the Ba-Serpent disappeared, the white-robed man was already quite close to the entrance of the cave, and so he instantly charged into it.

Swoosh. Ning charged after the white-robed man, but a few meters

away from the cavern entrance, he came to a sudden halt.

“Eh?” Ning stared at the black, foggy cavern entrance before him.

The entrance wasn’t that large, and it appeared quite ordinary. However...there was no way he could tell exactly what was within the cave. He couldn’t sense the aura of the white-robed man within it at all either.

“It seems...this cave is rather mysterious.” Ning stood in front of the cave, hesitating. Because he couldn’t sense any auras at all from the entrance, he had no idea what was inside.

.....

The Ba-Serpent had fled, but Ji Ning had remained atop the Ba-Serpent’s back. After the Ba-Serpent was dispersed, the forces of Bloodcloud Hall had all fled into the black cave. All of these things were seen by the silver-armored youth, the black-robed youngster, Big Han, and the others.

“So the forces of Bloodcloud Hall truly did use their ‘final option’.” The black-robed youngster had used a divine ability, causing spots of starlight to appear within his eyes. He could clearly see to a great distance. “I wonder if this Ji Ning will enter or not. If he enters, then he will definitely die.”

“True Immortals or Empyrean Gods might survive if they go in, but as for this Ji Ning...no matter how powerful his protective treasure is and no matter how formidable he is, he’ll definitely die,” the silver-armored youth said. “Of the Celestial Immortals who were killed by Bloodcloud Hall, quite a few died after they foolishly chased the Bloodcloud Hall assassins all the way into the cave.”

This cave entrance...

Was in reality a portal.

It led to a very mysterious place, a place that was countless times more dangerous than the Eastwoods mountain range.

Chapter 23: Celestial Immortal

Ji Ning stared at the black, foggy cave entrance in front of him for a moment, hesitating. This clearly was no ordinary cave. Neither his divine sense nor his [Torch-Dragon's Eye] and other senses were able to discover anything about the cave at all! However...Ning truly wanted to know who it was who was trying to kill him!

"The world of the Grand Xia is currently filled with dangerous undercurrents; it's best to be cautious. It's best if I don't go into unknown places." The reason why Ning had acted so arrogantly and brashly earlier was because everything was under control...but the depths of this black cave were beyond his understanding.

Whoosh.

Ning instantly departed from this region, but he was still surrounded by layers of formations.

Ning casually chose a mountain peak at random, sitting down in the lotus position atop it, then laughed loudly, "If you have any other abilities, use them to your heart's content! If you don't attack me...I'm going to use my Greater Teleportation Dao-seal to leave now."

His voice echoed within the skies, but no one came to attack him.

"It isn't the time to leave yet," Ning mused to himself. "Master is still undergoing his tribulation in that minor world. If the assassins wish to continue to assault me and lose track of me, they'll probably go back to that minor world. I might as well stay here then!"

.....

"Master, he didn't go in," the black-robed youngster said.

"Because he's not an idiot," the silver-armored youth said, shaking his head. "The Celestial Immortals who went in previously were all overconfident; they felt that their power was more than enough to ensure that they would survive. But how could they have known...that the tunnel leads to one of our true headquarters. Even True Immortals or Empyrean

Gods would at most be able to escape with their lives from that place.”

Both the black-robed youth and Big Han nodded. They had both been there before; they naturally knew exactly how terrifying that place was. As their headquarters...it was naturally far more dangerous than this Eastwoods mountain range.

“Master, Ji Ning is in our formation. Shall we attack him?” Big Han asked.

“What’s the point of attacking him?” The silver-armored youth looked towards him.

Big Han laughed awkwardly. “There’s no point to us attacking him, but if you were to attack, Master, wouldn’t you be able to easily capture him?”

“Stop flattering me,” the silver-armored youth snickered. “I, your master, know my own limits. This Ji Ning is quite mysterious; his protective abilities alone are enough to ensure that all of you weren’t able to do anything to him with your many frenzied attacks. Even the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens was unable to injure him. Although I dislike Bloodcloud Hall, they aren’t weak...and yet even squad Earthnine in their Ba-Serpent Formation was unable to harm him in the slightest! I’m not able to kill him.”

Big Han just chortled. He knew that his master tended to be very low-key...but that his master was in truth enormously powerful. More than ten Celestial Immortals had died to his master’s hand!

The silver-armored youth quietly stared at the distant Ning, speculating internally, “This Ji Ning’s background must be significant. If he trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]...then his background must be utterly shocking! I wonder whose disciple he is?”

“When divinities battle, mortals suffer. Compared to those major powers...people like me are like mortals, while they are divinities.”

“Low-key. Stay low-key.” The silver-armored youth had lived for a very long time, and had experienced very many things. Thus, he knew very well...

That Celestial Immortals might seem to be very powerful, but in the context of the entire Three Realms, they were actually nothing more than chess pieces. There were many danger zones that could cause Celestial Immortals to perish. Someone like Ji Ning, who had such a terrifying background...

True, if he killed Ji Ning, any Daofather behind Ji Ning most likely wouldn't lower himself to act against a Celestial Immortal like the silver-armored man. After all, for a Celestial Immortal to kill someone like Ji Ning wouldn't be considered a strong person bullying a much weaker person. But there were some madmen in the Three Realms who were wholly unreasonable, and who would fly into a rage and seek vengeance for any slain disciples!

"Although there are very few such madmen...perhaps one of Ji Ning's uncle-masters or fellow apprentices number such a madman amongst them," the silver-armored youth mumbled to himself. "It wasn't easy for me to stay alive for so long; I endured countless dangers before becoming a Celestial Immortal. I plan to survive this storm. Careful. Have to be careful; that's more important than anything else!"

"Master, then are we going to just let Ji Ning stay in the formation? Should we...?" Big Han looked towards the silver-armored youth.

"Just keep him trapped within the formation. If Bloodcloud Hall wishes to continue their assassination, let them. We won't participate any further," the silver-armored man said calmly. "If he wants to use a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal to leave, there's nothing we can do about that! As for attacking him? Forget it. Attacking him is a waste of elemental ki."

"Yes," Big Han assented respectfully.

Time passed, one day after the other.

The third day after the failure of the assassination attempt. Patriarch Arcanum was once more invited to Bloodcloud Hall. He was brought to that secluded garden once more, and it was still that same silver-robed maiden who welcomed him.

“How’d it go?” Patriarch Arcanum sat down, looking at the silver-robed youth facing him. “Did you kill Ji Ning?”

“No.” The silver-robed maiden shook her head.

“No?!” Patriarch Arcanum was shocked...and then enraged. “I’ve already given you the treasures, so you should go and kill him. If you weren’t able to kill him in your first wave of attacks, you should send out a second wave. In short...you should do what you promised and ensure that you kill him within the year. As for how you accomplish it? I don’t give a damn. But you need to do what you promised! This was a deal! My Youngflame clan has paid the price; you need to hold up to your end of the bargain.”

The silver-robed maiden nodded. “Your words are correct.”

Patriarch Arcanum was startled.

“Per our contract, if Bloodcloud Hall is unable to accomplish the mission, then we are to return your treasures to you.” The silver-robed maiden produced a storage ring. “This is what you gave to me previously; everything is here. Bloodcloud Hall lost money on this deal, but we’re still giving you everything back.”

“You...you...” Patriarch Arcanum couldn’t believe it.

A contract was a contract. If the assassination couldn’t be carried out, then the treasures would have to be repaid! This was something Bloodcloud Hall prided themselves on...but they rarely actually did this.

“Is Ji Ning very hard to kill?” Patriarch Arcanum frowned.

“If we truly had to kill him, Bloodcloud Hall could indeed do it.” The silver-robed maiden nodded.

“Then why don’t you?!” Patriarch Arcanum asked.

“The price isn’t high enough.” The silver-robed maiden looked towards Patriarch Arcanum.

“What’s the needed price?”

“Twenty top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures,” the silver-robed maiden said. “If you pay this price in treasures, Bloodcloud Hall will go

and kill Ji Ning. We erred in our estimation of his power, and so we set too low a price last time.”

Patriarch Arcanum’s face turned completely crimson with rage. “Why don’t you just go ahead and rob me?! You dare to name a price of twenty top-grade Immortal-ranked treasures? That’s equivalent to two Pure Yang treasures! That’s enough to invite even a True Immortal or Empyrean God to come and help out! How dare you name such a price?!” This price was indeed quite excessive; it would pose an enormous burden towards the Youngflame clan.

“Invite a True Immortal or Empyrean God?” The silver-robed maiden chuckled. “Go ahead and give it a try. Let’s see who would be willing to kill Ji Ning for you.”

Patriarch Arcanum gritted his teeth.

He knew very well that the more powerful an expert was, the more cautious they tended to be. Perhaps a Celestial Immortal killing Ji Ning wouldn’t be considered a strong person bullying a much weaker person, but a True Immortal or Empyrean God killing him definitely would be. If there truly was a Daofather standing behind Ji Ning...

If the Daofather was able to discover what was happening and was able to rescue Ji Ning before he died, things wouldn’t be too bad; the Daofather would at most teach the offender a lesson! But if the Daofather didn’t make it in time, or if he found out only after Ji Ning died...in his rage, the Daofather might truly go and slaughter the True Immortal or Empyrean God in question!

How many True Immortals or Empyrean Gods would be willing to risk their lives for the sake of two low-grade Pure Yang treasures?

“There should be some powerful Celestial Immortals that can kill Ji Ning, right?” Patriarch Arcanum growled.

“If you wish to invite Bloodcloud Hall to assassinate Ji Ning, then please hand over twenty top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures, or treasures of an equivalent value. If you aren’t willing, then please leave. Our business is concluded,” the silver-robed maiden said.

Patriarch Arcanum ground his teeth. Twenty...

Suppressing his anger, Patriarch Arcanum asked in a growl, "How powerful is Ji Ning?"

"You want to know?" The silver-robed maiden said, "This is a bit of valuable intelligence. If you are willing to return the storage ring and its contents to me, I can tell you."

"Hmph!" Angered, Patriarch Arcanum rose to his feet, turned, and left.

What a joke.

An intelligence report worth three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures?

After watching Patriarch Arcanum leave, the silver-robed maiden shook her head. "You idiotic fool. If you ask Bloodcloud Hall to kill Ji Ning, all you need to do was pay us enough treasures. But if you want to do it yourselves? Even if you were to summon your ancient Patriarch who first arose in the Fiendgod Era, and even if he was able to kill Ji Ning when using all his power...the price you would pay would be a price vastly beyond what your clan is capable of withstanding."

"Master wouldn't lie to me. He's suspected of having learned the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]! Not even Master was qualified to learn such a technique." The silver-robed maiden was stunned by this bit of news.

From the detailed intelligence report they had gained from their assassination attempt, Ji Ning either had an unearthly powerful protective item or had trained in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]! Either possibility had tremendous, extraordinary implications.

However...

Bloodcloud Hall specialized in carrying out extraordinary tasks. If the price was high enough, they would still dare to kill Ji Ning!

Time passed, one day after the other.

Within the minor world. The scorched, cracked, barren earth here would cause any who saw it to feel despair towards life.

“Why hasn’t Master woken up yet?” The black-robed Ning stared at the nearby Immortal Diancai.

“The demonheart tribulation will last for at least seven days, but at most...it’s hard to say.” Immortal Fivecraze shook his head. “Your master has only spent ten days in the demonheart tribulation. Don’t be impatient.”

“Right.” The black-robed Ning nodded.

“And how is your true body doing? Is it in any danger?” Immortal Fivecraze asked, worried. The nearby Whitewater Hound looked towards Ning as well.

The black-robed Ning laughed helplessly. “Don’t worry. I really am not in any danger at all.”

But Immortal Fivecraze and Uncle White couldn’t help but worry. If Ning’s true body truly was completely safe, it would’ve already returned to this minor world. And yet, it hadn’t. What they didn’t realize...was that Ning was intentionally keeping his true body in the Eastwoods mountain range, so as to draw the attention of his foes and prevent disaster from befalling his master.

“Let me out. Ji Ning, Fivecraze, just let me out. You won’t be able to kill me; what’s the point of keeping me trapped here?” Trapped within the formation, the Scion of the Blood God, still within his little black ship, was calling out loudly. He truly felt regret for coming here. Although by relying on his ship, he made it impossible for them to harm him...he was trapped within this formation and unable to escape. He had no idea that the enemy included such a formidable formations expert.

The black-robed Ning, Immortal Fivecraze, and Uncle White couldn’t even be bothered to look at the Scion.

They were just going to keep him locked up in here!

If he was permitted to leave, he might stir up more trouble. It was best to keep him trapped here! That way, they wouldn’t worry about him disrupting Immortal Diancai’s tribulation later.

“Eh?” Suddenly, the black-robed Ning, Fivecraze, and Uncle White all turned their heads to stare at Immortal Diancai, still seated in the lotus position.

Immortal Diancai had already opened his eyes. Within them could be seen two things; infinite ancientness, and a hint of tears.

“Master!” The black-robed Ning called out excitedly.

Chapter 24: Whither the Immortal Treasure?

“Junior apprentice-brother!” Immortal Fivecraze looked excitedly towards Immortal Diancai.

All of them just stared with bated breaths.

Immortal Diancai’s eyes were open. He remained seated in the lotus position, but rainbow-colored clouds suddenly began to appear in the skies. These fortuitous clouds descended around Immortal Diancai, and in the ground around him there began to manifest petals of a golden lotus flower. It seemed as though Immortal Diancai was seated atop an enormous golden lotus. Murmurs of what sounded like celestial music could be heard from the world around him. Of course, this wasn’t an actual melody; rather, it was the sound of the Heavens and the Earth. Just listening to it, one would feel as though it was filled with infinite mysteries.

At the same time, a terrifying aura of power began to descend, completely enveloping Immortal Diancai.

“Such terrifying power.” The black-robed Ji Ning and the others all felt their hearts tremble, even though they were barely touched by the power itself.

Whoosh...

An enormous flood of natural power began to gather around Immortal Diancai. His body now began to manifest the ‘aura of an Immortal soul’, something which one would have only after becoming a Celestial Immortal. His energy was transforming on a fundamental level as well.

From the Zifu stage to the Void stage, one merely had ‘elemental ki’.

After becoming a Celestial Immortal, the power of the soul and all other powers would completely merge into one power. The lotus-bud at the top of the Goldlotus Primal would draw in the essence of all the other types of power, fusing them into one and then refining them into a single

brilliant golden pellet, a 'Jindan'. 1

This new power could be described as either dharmic energy or Immortal energy.

"The great path of the Jindan, the great path of the Jindan...once the golden pellet enters my flank, then my destiny shall no longer be subject to the Heavens." Immortal Diancai laughed softly, "All shall become one, a perfect, flawless whole...from this day forth, there shall be no more Three Calamities, no more Nine Tribulations. I have truly become a carefree Immortal, having escaped the rules of the Three Realms and the binds of the Five Elements."

"Congratulations, Master. Felicitations, Master!" The black-robed Ning walked over.

"Haha, junior apprentice-brother, oh, junior apprentice-brother...you didn't let us down! Ahahaha..." Immortal Fivecraze was the most excited person right now. "After countless years...our Black-White College has finally produced a second Celestial Immortal. A Celestial Immortal! True immortality, an infinite lifespan...a Celestial Immortal!!! And one who overcame six nine-sets of the thunder tribulation! Haha, even if this crazy old man was to die right away, it would be worth it!"

There were differences in power amongst Celestial Immortals as well. Ordinary thunder tribulations, such as those with two nine-sets or three nine-sets, wouldn't be too powerful. By contrast, some extraordinarily powerful Fiendgod experts might be capable of overcoming nine nine-sets and become Empyrean Gods, immediately comparable to Pure Yang True Immortals in power.

"Eh? What's going on here?" Immortal Diancai was startled. He asked in surprise, "What's that little black ship inside this formation?"

"Celestial Immortal Diancai, congratulations to you!" A person emerged from within the little black ship; it was the sect leader of the Blood God Church, the Scion of the Blood God. Laughing loudly, he said, "It's quite rare to be able to see the birth of a Celestial Immortal. Still...you have to thank this fine disciple you have here. He killed seven of my Law

Protectors, then trapped me here. If it wasn't for the fact I wanted to see if you would become a Celestial Immortal, Immortal Diancai, I would've left long ago. Alright...no more playing around with you."

The Scion returned to his ship. Then, with a rumble and a ripple...he disappeared into thin air.

He had been clenching a Dao-seal when he he was speaking.

"Made him waste a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal. Worth it." Immortal Fivecraze laughed and nodded.

"What's this he said about killing seven Law Protectors?" Immortal Diancai frowned. "And Ji Ning, this is your Primaltwin, yes? Where's your true body?"

After having known Ji Ning for so long, Immortal Diancai knew quite well that Ning himself liked to wear furs, while his Primaltwin usually wore black robes.

Ning laughed. "These are all just minor matters."

"Let me be the one to tell you." Immortal Fivecraze called out excitedly, "Junior apprentice-brother, you have no idea. When you were undergoing your demonheart tribulation, everything happened just as you predicted; someone came to attack you. First came the Scion of the Blood God; he came in person, commanding his seven mighty Law Protectors to assault you. This precious disciple of yours showed of all his might..."

Immortal Fivecraze was in an absolutely divine mood as he blabbered on and on. Finally, he finished his tale.

Immortal Diancai looked towards Ning, feeling a hint of guilt in his heart. "Disciple, sorry for the trouble."

"It's fine. My true body is fine as well. In addition, the second group of assassins, the stronger ones, they came for me, not for you, Master," Ning said.

Immortal Diancai shook his head. "Because I was undergoing my tribulation, you were distracted and had to worry about me; that's the

reason why they chose this opportunity to assassinate you. In a normal situation where you didn't have to worry about me...you probably wouldn't even have had to fight. You could've slipped away long ago."

"Enough, enough! No need for the two of you, master and disciple, to stand on such ceremony," Immortal Fivecraze laughed loudly. "Our Black-White College now has a Celestial Immortal. This is a joyous event! Come, come, come. Hurry back to the Black-White College and let all of our fellow disciples learn of this and celebrate. You became a Celestial Immortal! That is the dream of every Immortal cultivator."

"Are we going to just publicize the fact that Master became a Celestial Immortal?" Ning asked.

Immortal Fivecraze laughed. "We would like to keep it a secret, but since even the Scion of the Blood God knows about it, news will quickly spread. Thus, we should still inform the Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals of the Black-White College. We should also notify Celestial Immortal Hunchmont of the Northmont clan of Stillwater."

"Celestial Immortal Hunchmont?" Ning was puzzled.

"There is a deeper meaning in this. The reason why our Black-White College is established directly within Stillwater City is because we long ago decided to share weal and woe with the Northmont clan of Stillwater," Immortal Fivecraze said. "The reason why the Black-White College can recruit all the geniuses we want from throughout the entire Stillwater City and not be impeded in the slightest is because of the Northmont clan; without their permission, how could this be possible?"

Ning now understood.

"Junior apprentice-brother, now that you are a Celestial Immortal, the Northmont clan will definitely want to further deepen the relationship between themselves and our Black-White College," Immortal Fivecraze laughed. "And of course...our Black-White College has toiled so hard on their behalf. Now that you became a Celestial Immortal, they need to prepare a valuable gift to congratulate you. Junior apprentice-brother, aren't you lacking in formidable Immortal swords? Now let me think..."

where should we get such precious treasures? How about...from the Northmont clan of Stillwater?"

Ning nodded. Compared to those ancient clans, Ning was a bit lacking in treasures; after all, his Primaltwin needed all the Heavenraker swords for the [Heavenraker] sword-formation, while his true body needed six Immortal-ranked swords, but didn't have them! If he wanted to help out his master, he ideally had to offer five formidable Immortal-ranked swords; after all, his master already had five Immortal-ranked swords, just somewhat weak ones.

However, the Northmont clan had existed for countless generations after obtaining the marquisdom for Stillwater Commandery back during the Fiendgod Era. They had given birth to a number of Celestial Immortals, and they definitely had quite a few treasures. The Youngflame clan was capable of bringing out even twenty top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures if necessary; although the Northmont clan was a bit weaker, they still had quite a deep foundation.

"Let's go. Back to Stillwater City," Immortal Fivecraze urged.

"Let's go."

This time, they didn't need to so carefully creep into the dimensional corridor; rather, they tore a hole through space and returned straight to the world of the Grand Xia, then immediately used a spatial teleport to return to Stillwater City.

.....

The Eastwoods mountain range. One particular mountain, surrounded by layers of formations.

Ning was seated in the lotus position here.

"Master became a Celestial Immortal." Ning's face was covered with delight; he felt as though his heart and soul had just become much less burdened. "I want to prepare a valuable gift to congratulate master as well, but alas...all of the Immortal-ranked treasures I obtained from killing those seven Law Protectors were quite ordinary."

The seven Law Protectors had previously all been ordinary Loose Immortals, after all; it was only thanks to a secret technique that in the past twenty to thirty years, they had increased their levels of power to that of a five hundred thousand year old Loose Immortal. But although their power levels had risen, their magic treasures hadn't changed much yet.

"Time for me to go back now."

The reason why Ning had allowed himself to be pummeled like a beanbag without fleeing was because he didn't want to disrupt his master's tribulation. Now that the tribulation was over, it was time for him to go back.

Whoosh. Ning rose to his feet, staring at the surrounding area.

"Where exactly am I, and what is this place? Where in the Grand Xia Dynasty is it? Why is such a terrifyingly strong power hidden here?" The twelve white-robed figures who had attacked him...the terrifying killing formation, 'Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens Cauldron'...that mysterious, foggy black cave entrance...Ning could tell from these things that this place was definitely quite extraordinary!

"I need to investigate. After suffering for so long, I need to at least ensure that I know who it is that caused me so much trouble."

"In addition...the world of the Grand Xia is in a state of chaos right now. This hidden power is most likely one of the causes of it. Only when one knows both one's self and one's foe can one win a hundred battles without fail," Ning mused to himself. Perhaps investigating this place might bring him some danger, but by relying on the 'Seventy-Two Transformations' of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], I can infiltrate and investigate this place. Not even True Immortals or Empyrean Gods would be able to discover who I truly was, unless they have a special divine ability that can see through the 'Seventy-Two Transformations'...but those are far too rare."

"Time to go!" Ning immediately activated the Greater Teleportation Dao-seal he had taken out. Swoosh! Ning instantly disappeared.

.....

“General,” the Eastwoods sect leader reported, “Ji Ning has already used a Greater Teleportation Dao-seal to leave.”

“If he’s gone, he’s gone.” The silver-armored youth didn’t care one whit.

.....

A million kilometers east of the Eastwoods mountain range. Ning suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

By relying on his Greater Teleportation Dao-seal, he could’ve teleported straight back to Swallow Mountain or Stillwater City, but Ning had to find out just who it was that had trapped him in that location. Thus, he had only teleported a million kilometers! He refused to believe that the enemy base spanned a million kilometers.

Swoosh. Ning flew towards the air above an ordinary commandery city. Sweeping it with his divine sense, he instantly found the most powerful person within the city; a Zifu Disciple.

Whoosh. Ning used a spatial teleport to appear in the person’s study.

There was an old man in the study, leafing through some books.

“Who are you?” The old man lifted his head, instantly shocked.

“I’m going to ask you some questions,” Ning said, and the old man’s gaze instantly turned lost and dull.

“Which commandery is this?” Ning asked.

“Flamedoor Commandery,” the old man said.

Ning was startled. Flamedoor Commandery; it wasn’t too far away from Stillwater Commandery, just two commanderies away.

“What is the name of this city?” Ning asked.

“Weirflow,” the old man said.

Ning frowned. There were far too many commandery cities, and they often changed names. Once a tribe took over a commandery city, they would often change its name. For example, the first commandery city the

Ji clan had taken over, they had renamed to the City of Ten Thousand Swords. Precisely because commandery cities changed names so often, maps generally wouldn't even have city names written down for most of them.

“Which mountains and rivers are nearby?” Ning asked. “Large-scale ones.”

“More than a hundred thousand kilometers east of the city, there is a vast mountain range that spans tens of thousands of kilometers known as the Goosewine Mountains,” the old man said.

Ning's eyes immediately lit up. The Goosewine Mountains?

Ning had long ago memorized a map of the entire domain of the Grand Xia Dynasty. He quickly ascertained his current, exact location! Upon doing so, Ning quickly was able to calculate who was located a million kilometers away from him: “The Eastwoods mountain range...the Eastwoods Sect! So that's where they were hiding!”

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1. Readers of Stellar Transformations may recall that in that novel, the power rankings started off as Houtian, Xiantian, Jindan, etc., with Jindan being the first level of 'true' Immortal practitioners.

Chapter 25: The Old Patriarch of the Northmont Clan of Stillwater

After calculating that the mysterious mountain range had been the Eastwoods mountain range, Ji Ning didn't immediately go to verify it. Instead, he used a spatial teleportation to return to Stillwater City. His master had just broken through to become a Celestial Immortal, after all; he had to be present for the announcement. If his true body wasn't, his master and Immortal Fivecraze would probably still feel uneasy.

Stillwater City. The Black-White College.

Although it was noon, and although there had just been a big blizzard, the Headmaster's Hall of the Black-White College was a place of joy right now.

"I am going to tell everyone a piece of earth-shatteringly good news. Our Black-White College...has given birth to a Celestial Immortal! This is the second Celestial Immortal our Black-White College has had since our founding!" Immortal Fivecraze spoke out loudly from the front of the hall, his voice echoing within it. The entire hall suddenly turned silent, a queer, shocked silence. All of the Void-level Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals were staring at Immortal Fivecraze in disbelief.

"Ten days ago, Ji Ning and I guarded junior apprentice-brother Diancai as he underwent the wind tribulation, the fire tribulation, the thunder tribulation, and the demonheart tribulation. After overcoming these four great tribulations, junior apprentice-brother Diancai has become a Celestial Immortal." Immortal Fivecraze's voice continued to echo out within the hall.

"Celestial Immortal?!"

"Junior apprentice-brother Diancai!"

"Senior apprentice-brother Diancai!"

"Ji Ning, has your master truly become a Celestial Immortal?"

“You idiots! Do you think I’d lie to you about something like this?!”

“Everyone, I have indeed become a Celestial Immortal, thanks to the protection of Ji Ning and senior apprentice-brother Fivecraze.”

Instantly, the entire Headmaster’s Hall turned into a storm of joy. Everyone called out in celebration, especially after Immortal Diancai personally released his aura of might. After everyone felt the aura of a Celestial Immortal coming from him, they began to rejoice even more!

To become a Celestial Immortal...the implications were extraordinary.

It must be understood that back in the annals of history, when the Black-White College gave birth to a Celestial Immortal, its status had risen to become equivalent to the Northmont clan of Stillwater and the local branch of the Raindragon Guard. Celestial Immortals were truly unaging. They would live for a very long time, and so long as they were alive, the entire sect would have a firm foundation..

As all the Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals were celebrating with wild agitation and excitement, Immortal Fivecraze sent Immortal Jadesea to the Northmont clan of Stillwater. He personally went to request a meeting with Celestial Immortal Hunchmont to notify him of this matter.

“Did you just say that Immortal Diancai has become a Celestial Immortal?” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont was very stable and solid, but even so he revealed a look of astonishment.

Celestial Immortals were far too rare.

Normally speaking, it was extremely rare for even a single one to appear in a million years within the world of the Grand Xia Dynasty. Even now, with the Three Realms in a state of chaos, they still were very, very rare.

“Senior Hunchmont, I wouldn’t dare lie about something like this,” the former headmaster, Immortal Jadesea, said with a laugh. “When senior apprentice-brother Diancai underwent his tribulation, he had Ji Ning and senior apprentice-brother Fivecraze protecting him.”

“Good, good, good.” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont leaned on his wooden staff, laughing as he spoke. “This is good news for the entire

Stillwater Commandery. Go back now; I'll make some preparations, then head to your Black-White College."

"Yes. I'll leave now." Immortal Jadesea bowed respectfully, then immediately departed.

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont hesitated slightly within the room, then quickly departed, moving to a palace that the Northmont clan usually used for discussing major affairs. As he did, he barked, "Shut the palace doors. Everyone, depart."

"Yes." The guards all respectfully acknowledged the order.

Rumble...

After the palace door was shut, the enormous palace became shrouded within darkness.

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont waved his hand, and eight enormous candles suddenly began to blaze, lighting up the palace.

"Elder brother," Hunchmont called out.

Instantly, the eyes of a sculpture of a strange beast that was located above the throne at the front of the hall suddenly lit up. It glanced towards him, and then the beast sculpture's mouth moved as well. "Hunchmont. What is it?"

"Elder brother, our Stillwater Commandery has given birth to a Celestial Immortal," Hunchmont said hurriedly.

"Who?" The strange beast sculpture asked.

"Immortal Diancai of the Black-White College," Hunchmont replied.

The strange beast sculpture said, "The Black-White College has the closest of relationships with our Stillwater Commandery. This has been true for countless years. After becoming a Celestial Immortal, Immortal Diancai will naturally stand on the side of our Northmont clan of Stillwater. Especially during a time like this...the more powerful the Northmont clan's forces are, the better. This is absolutely wonderful news."

“Right.” Hunchmont nodded. “That’s what I thought as well. But elder brother, Diancai has just made his breakthrough; what sort of gift should we give him? His sword-arts are based on the Five Elements; he is most suited for using five Immortal swords. Why don’t we give him a gift of five high-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords?”

“Do you remember how, back in the Fiendgod Era,” the strange beast sculpture said, “I battled against Patriarch Fiveghosts at the Yuchang River, then slew him? I acquired a set of five Immortal swords from that battle. I still have them. Give them to this Immortal Diancai.”

“But those are five top-grade Immortal-ranked swords!” Hunchmont was shocked.

“Times are changing,” the strange beast sculpture said. “In a normal era, a gift of five high-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords would already be quite an incredible gift...but you know as well as I do that the entire world of the Grand Xia is shaking right now. Even I can vaguely sense in my subconscious that a storm is coming...and it is very possible that our Northmont clan of Stillwater shall perish within it. Thus, it is important that we not be stingy at a time like this. Only when you are willing to give some things up are you able to gain even more important things!”

“After we give him a set of five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, he will naturally feel grateful towards us...and thus we will have firmly pulled this Celestial Immortal Diancai under the Northmont clan’s war-banners. The Northmont clan of Stillwater currently only has two Celestial Immortals; if we count in Diancai, then we shall have three! That will make the foundations of the clan to be even more secure.”

“Elder brother, your plans are far-sighted,” Hunchmont said respectfully.

This elder brother of his had lived for far longer than he had.

In truth, this ‘elder brother’ was born unfathomably many generations before he had been. However, because both were Celestial Immortals, they considered themselves to be of the same generation in addressing each other. Still...Celestial Immortal Hunchmont revered this person

greatly, because this person was the true foundation for the strength and prosperity of the Northmont clan.

“When you bring those five Immortal-ranked flying swords over, invite Celestial Immortal Diancai and that Ji Ning to come. I wish to see them both,” the strange beast sculpture said.

“Elder brother, you wish to see them?” Hunchmont was amazed; even within the Northmont clan, the vast majority of the many generations of marquises had no idea that there was such a powerful Patriarch who was still alive. This was the reason why the generations of marquises were so cautious and reserved, not causing any trouble; they didn’t know exactly how powerful their clan was.

“I certainly have to see Celestial Immortal Diancai; after all, in the future, when the storm truly erupts, he will be fighting alongside us, shoulder-to-shoulder. As for Ji Ning? His background is extraordinary, and in the end, he might prove to be even more important to us than Celestial Immortal Diancai,” the strange beast sculpture said.

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The Headmaster’s Hall of the Black-White College.

The many Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals, along with Immortal Diancai, were all gathered here. There was a feast ongoing. Just as the feast was halfway through and as everyone was celebrating, a hunchbacked old man entered the hall, leaning on a wooden staff.

“Senior Hunchmont.”

“Senior Hunchmont.”

Everyone immediately rose to their feet. Even Ning rose.

“Congratulations, fellow Daoist Diancai,” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont laughed. “You’ve overcome the four tribulations of wind, fire, thunder, and demonheart; you are now a Celestial Immortal.”

“I’ve only brought one thing with me. I’ve heard, fellow Daoist Diancai, that you are skilled in a Five Elements sword-art. Our Northmont clan

just so happened to have a set of five top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords in our treasury, and so I brought them to give them to you, fellow Daoist. Fellow Daoist Diancai, you absolutely must not decline.”

“Top-grade Immortal-ranked??”

“Five of them?”

“Am I hearing things?”

The Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals of the Black-White College began to sent mental messages to each other. They had all guessed that the Northmont clan would bring congratulatory gifts, but they hadn’t expected that the gifts would be so valuable.

Ning was shocked upon hearing this as well. He had guessed that the gift would be five high-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, not top-grade! The Northmont clan truly was generous!

Immortal Diancai was similarly shocked. Naturally, he hurriedly moved to refuse; this gift was far too valuable, bringing great pressure to bear down upon him.

“Diancai, don’t refuse!” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont feigned anger. “If you keep refusing, I’m going to turn and leave!”

Only then did Immortal Diancai accept the gift.

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The celebratory banquet continued until past midnight, when it finally concluded. Celestial Immortal Hunchmont stealthily sent a mental message to both Ji Ning and Immortal Diancai, and so after the banquet, the two of them both headed towards the Marquisate of Stillwater.

The Marquisate of Stillwater.

Ji Ning, Immortal Diancai, and Celestial Immortal Hunchmont were walking together.

“Senior Hunchmont,” Ning laughed, “We’ve arrived at the Marquisate. Senior, you can tell us what this is about now, right?”

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont laughed. "Patriarch Unity of our Northmont clan wishes to see you two."

"Patriarch Unity of the Northmont clan?" Ji Ning and Immortal Diancai were both startled; where did this additional Northmont clan Patriarch come from?! When Ning had been weak, he had even thought that perhaps the Northmont clan didn't have so much as a single Celestial Immortal; it was only later on that he learned of Hunchmont's existence. He hadn't expected them to have a second one!

Ning couldn't help but sigh in amazement. The roots of an ancient clan such as this one truly were extremely deep.

"Can it be...the Supreme Sword Immortal, Celestial Immortal Unity?" Immortal Diancai cried out in shock.

"Right." Celestial Immortal Hunchmont chortled.

"Master, who is this 'Supreme Sword Immortal', this 'Celestial Immortal Unity'?" Ning asked, puzzled. Immortal Diancai explained, "I learned about him by accident. The Northmont clan of Stillwater has had quite a few Celestial Immortals in its history, but over the course of countless ages, most are presumed deceased. The most dazzling one of them all was this Supreme Sword Immortal! He existed back during the Fiendgod Era, and he submitted himself to the Xia Emperor's rule, battling and fighting on the Xia Emperor's behalf. Countless Fiendgods and countless Immortals died to his sword, and in the end, he won a marquisdom for the Northmont clan; the marquisdom of Stillwater Commandery. However... according to the legends, he perished during the Milky Way War. How is it that he is still alive?"

Ning, upon hearing this, was stunned. This old fellow had existed as far back as the Fiendgod Era, and had won the marquisdom for the Northmont clan?

"Haha, Patriarch Unity was indeed badly wounded during the Milky Way War, but he didn't actually die. Still...that battle was a major blow for the Old Patriarch. The Old Patriarch felt so much grief, it was as though he had died. He never showed his face in the world again.

Countless years have passed, but there has never been any word regarding the Old Patriarch as far as the outside world has been concerned, and so that's why everyone believed him to have perished," Celestial Immortal Hunchmont explained.

Immortal Diancai now understood.

"The five Immortal swords gifted to you came from Patriarch Fiveghosts, who Patriarch Unity slew back during the Fiendgod Era." Celestial Immortal Hunchmont laughed. "It was the Old Patriarch who personally instructed for those swords to be given to you."

Immortal Diancai nodded, then said to Ji Ning, "Ji Ning, when you see senior Unity, you must not behave improperly."

Ning nodded.

He felt tremendous curiosity towards this Patriarch Unity; this was a truly legendary figure, one who had led his clan to rove the world in the Fiendgod Era, fighting and conquering countless foes before suddenly vanishing for seemingly all eternity. It must be understood that for a person to hide himself so thoroughly as to completely sever all contact with all other Celestial Immortals was quite a painful choice. Not everyone had an ability like Ning's 'Seventy-Two Transformations', after all.

"Here we are. My elder brother is right inside." Celestial Immortal Hunchmont stood outside a seemingly ordinary courtyard.

Chapter 26: The State of Affairs

He pushed open the door to the courtyard. This was a very large courtyard, with grapes, willow trees, apple trees, and other types of trees within it. However, because it was winter, it naturally appeared a bit desolate.

Upon entering, Ji Ning felt as though this was the residence of an ordinary mortal.

Soon, Ning locked his gaze upon a distant gray-robed youth. The gray-robed youth's head was raised, and he was looking at a willow tree. "It's been a long time since I've returned to the Grand Xia...but this courtyard is still laid out the same way it was in the past. It hasn't changed at all. Hunchmont...thank you."

"This is the only place you like to stay in, elder brother. I naturally had to keep it in good shape," Celestial Immortal Hunchmont said.

The gray-robed youth turned his head to look at them.

Ning and Immortal Diancai were both startled. The gaze of this gray-robed youth was as deep and penetrating as the waters of an icy pool. His aura was extremely profound. Although the two knew very little about him, both Ning and Immortal Diancai could feel...that if they were to fight, they probably would be far from being a match for this figure.

"It seems he is a supreme figure amongst Celestial Immortals," Ning mused to himself. There could be huge differences in power amongst Celestial Immortals, much like how Ning, despite being merely a Void-level Earth Immortals, could effortlessly sweep groups of Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals with his power.

"Greetings to you, senior Unity," Ning said.

"Greetings to you, fellow Daoist Unity," Immortal Diancai said.

Ning was still technically at the Void-level, after all; since he was unwilling to reveal his status as a Daofather's disciple, he naturally addressed Celestial Immortals the way most ordinary Void-level Earth

Immortals would; as 'senior'.

"Diancai? Ji Ning?" The gray-robed youth looked at the two of them, a hint of a smile on his face. He then casually pointed at nearby wooden chairs. "Sit." With a gesture from his hand, all the dust disappeared from the chairs.

The gray-robed youth was the first to sit down. He even produced a tea kettle and teacups, pouring each of them a cup. "This is green tea. You can drink it after boiling it; it is a fairly common refreshment in many major worlds. However, it's a bit rarer in our world of the Grand Xia. Have a taste. I personally planted this tea tree and personally collected the tea leaves."

Ning and Immortal Diancai were both rather startled. They immediately tasted it.

Ning could sense a thick aroma waft into his mouth and spread throughout his entire body, the flavor limitless. "Good tea."

"Ji Ning, you like to drink tea as well?" The gray-robed youth asked curiously.

Ning was startled. He hurriedly replied, "I occasionally drink it."

In truth, just now Ning was unconsciously drawing from his tea-drinking experiences from his past life on Earth.

"Tea is quite flavorful. I took on many masters to study this art, to study various types of tea trees, how to plant tea trees, how to select the right soil, and use the proper type of water..." The gray-robed youth laughed. "Haha, enough of that. I'm happy to talk about this all day, but I imagine that you would be bored senseless by it."

Immortal Diancai asked curiously, "Fellow Daoist Unity, you've taken on many masters?"

"All mortals," the gray-robed youth laughed.

"Mortals?"

Immortal Diancai and Ji Ning both felt startled; a Celestial Immortal

who was willing to take on a mortal as a master? Not just anyone could do something like this!

“I invited the two of you over for a nice chat,” the gray-robed youth said with a laugh. “A storm is about to befall the Three Realms, and the world of the Grand Xia is naturally not going to be able to avoid it. In addition, there are some hidden powers who are making use of this storm to cause waves of their own. In truth...ever since the Milky Way War, I’ve been living the life of an ordinary mortal. I’ve been quite relaxed...but this can no longer continue.”

“The life of an ordinary mortal?” Immortal Diancai frowned.

“If you wish to live a longer live, then you need to avoid being stained by karma,” the gray-robed youth said with a laugh. “What is karma? If you have a friend, and your friend falls into danger, you will naturally go help him; this is karma! If someone like me always hides within a minor world of mortals and doesn’t interact with any Celestial Immortals, with all my friends and enemies believing me to be dead...then they naturally won’t come bother me. This can be considered ‘severing karma’.”

“I live a carefree life. Naturally, I’m able to live a long, long life.” The gray-robed youth looked towards Immortal Diancai, then laughed, “After this storm ends, fellow Daoist Diancai, you should also set up a ‘false death’ then hide yourself in a minor world of mortals. You can live for trillions of years and still probably wouldn’t perish...unless, of course, you encounter yet another storm like this one, which no one will be able to avoid.”

Ning and Immortal Diancai were speechless upon hearing this.

They understood...that this was indeed a fine way to ‘live a long life’. However, not everyone had this sort of willpower, to go live the life of a mortal despite being an exalted Celestial Immortal.

“Senior Unity, you say that no one will be able to avoid this coming storm?” Ning hurriedly asked.

“Perhaps the truly exalted Daofathers will remain safe,” the gray-robed youth said, “But for Celestial Immortals like us, and perhaps even for

True Immortals and Empyrean Gods, I wager...it will be hard to avoid this storm. Based on what I know, this storm is about to envelop the entire Three Realms. A small place like our Stillwater Commandery has also been thrown into chaos. For example, the rise of the Blood God Church!”

“Senior, you should be able to eradicate the Blood God Church, right?” Ning asked.

“Eradicating them would naturally be easy. If I made a trip, they would be immediately wiped out. But if I did that, then the Northmont clan of Stillwater will most likely be viewed as a dangerous source of trouble for that hidden power,” the gray-robed youth said. “Thus...we shall simply continue the low-level struggle against them. We’ll slowly play with the Blood God Church. The biggest benefit of going with the flow is that when the true storm comes, we’ll all be able to join together to fight side-by-side.”

Immortal Diancai asked, “A hidden power? Which power?”

“I don’t know either. I imagine you, Diancai, also know that the Grand Xia Dynasty is currently in a state of great chaos. Clearly, the various evil or berserk clans and sects now all have hidden supporters,” the gray-robed youth said. “In fact, I suspect...that some marquises have already thrown their support to the hidden power.”

“The marquises have changed their loyalties?!” Ning and Diancai were both shocked.

“The waters are far too muddy right now. No one knows exactly what is going on. Not even the Xia Emperor dares to truly exert his power right now. Everyone is building up their power, waiting quietly to fight,” the gray-robed youth said. “It is the Xia Emperor’s job to deal with the hidden power; as for us, all we need to do is survive. To allow our clans and sects to survive! Thus, I hope that both of you, Ji Ning and fellow Daoist Diancai, shall stand together alongside myself and Hunchmont. If we join forces...we’ll be able to protect the Black-White College, protect Swallow Mountain, and protect the Northmont clan of Stillwater.”

Ning and Immortal Diancai exchanged a glance.

“Alright.”

“Of course.”

Both of them nodded, agreeing to this alliance.

One chopstick is easily broken. A bundle of chopsticks are hard to break!

.....

Because the Black-White College had a long-standing relationship with the Northmont clan, Ning and his master naturally decided to fight on their side and ally with them!

“I wonder if you two seniors are aware...of any powers within the world of the Grand Xia who are skilled in the Ba-Serpent Formation?” Ning asked.

“Ba-Serpent Formation?” Looks of puzzlement appeared on the faces of the gray-robed youth and Hunchmont.

“There are some powers in the Three Realms that are skilled in the Ba-Serpent Formation, but as for the world of the Grand Xia...I truly haven’t heard of any.” The gray-robed youth shook his head. “Hunchmont, have you heard anything? You are often here at the Grand Xia; you should know more than me.”

“I haven’t heard of anything either. The Ba-Serpent Formation is no ordinary formation.” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont shook his head as well.

The next dawn.

Ji Ning arrived at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain of Stillwater City. One of the Diremonster Immortals of the Mountain, a Celestial Fox Immortal, personally came to greet him. She was the highest-ranking member of this branch of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.

“Fellow Daoist Ji Ning, might I ask why you have come to my Heavenly Treasures Mountain?” The Celestial Fox Immortal was astonishingly alluring, and her bewitching body was sinuous and curvaceous beneath

the gauze she wore.

Ning said, “I wish to investigate regarding a technique known as the Ba-Serpent Formation.”

“Ba-Serpent Formation?” The Celestial Fox Immortal was startled. “Alright. Fellow Daoist Ji Ning, wait a moment. I’ll go look.”

“Alright.” Ning nodded.

He ended up waiting nearly a full hour.

Ning stared in astonishment as a silver-haired man suddenly appeared before him.

When he had gone to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia to sell off that arrow, he had encountered this individual, ‘Skyfox’. The reason why many of the branches of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain of the Grand Xia Dynasty were all managed by Celestial Foxes was precisely because the main Heavenly Treasures Mountain was established by this individual, Patriarch Skyfox – the silver-haired man before him.

“Fellow Daoist Ji Ning, you wish to learn about the Ba-Serpent Formation?” The silver-haired man looked towards Ning.

“Senior Skyfox, why have you come to Stillwater?” Ning asked, surprised.

The silver-haired man laughed. Ever since the Xia Emperor had become convinced that Ning had a huge background, the Heavenly Treasures Mountain had naturally elevated Ning’s status in their eyes to an extremely high level. He was given more latitude than even most Celestial Immortal Patriarchs. When he made an intelligence request, this request was instantly relayed to the main headquarters, and once the main headquarters knew, Patriarch Skyfox had personally hurried to Stillwater.

“I know that you wish to learn of the Ba-Serpent Formation, and so I came,” the silver-haired man said.

“Does this involve something major?” Ning asked, surprised.

“Yes.” The silver-haired man nodded. “Very major. This intelligence

report is very precious as well. The Heavenly Treasures Mountain wouldn't even give this report to most Celestial Immortals...but the Xia Emperor views you with great favor, and so we can give it to you."

Hearing that the Xia Emperor viewed himself with favor, Ning couldn't help but say in a rather helpless way, "The Xia Emperor isn't angry at me for not accepting Sword Immortal Evergreen as my master?"

"Your choice of a master is primarily your own affair. No matter what, you are still a member of the world of the Grand Xia; you are one of our own. How could the Xia Emperor be such a petty person?" The silver-haired man laughed.

Ning instantly felt relieved. He could tell that clearly, the Xia Emperor wished to befriend him.

"The Ba-Serpent Formation...?" Ning looked at him.

"The Ba-Serpent Formation. In the entire world of the Grand Xia, there is only a single power that knows how to execute it: Bloodcloud Hall," the silver-haired man said.

"Bloodcloud Hall?" Ning was puzzled; he had never heard of it before.

"This is a very secretive assassin's guild; the number one assassin's guild of the Grand Xia." The silver-haired man waved his hand, delivering a thick tome towards Ning. "There are a series of intelligence reports here regarding Bloodcloud Hall, as well as the links between them and some other hidden powers. All of these hidden powers, including Bloodcloud Hall, belong to a single mastermind, the great foe of the Grand Xia."

Ning was startled.

Almost all of the information regarding the powers serving this enemy mastermind had been recorded down in this book. This sort of intelligence report was indeed priceless; the Xia Emperor was actually willing to let him see it?

"What, don't you want to read it? This is a detailed report that came at a price of countless lives. Although we aren't able to completely uncover the face of the enemy mastermind...we can vaguely make him out now."

The silver-haired man continued to hold out that thick tome.

Ning laughed, then stretched his hand out and accepted it.

Chapter 27: The Sixteenth Stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]

Roughly thirty years ago, mysterious organizations began to appear throughout the entire world of the Grand Xia. It seemed as though they had come from another world.

One of the organizations was known as Bloodcloud Hall.

Bloodcloud Hall was an assassin's guild. It didn't participate in any political struggles; whoever gave them treasures, they would help in carrying out assassinations! They would assassinate anyone from puny mortals to mighty Celestial Immortals! They could kill anyone in the entire world of the Grand Xia, aside from the Grand Xia Emperor himself. Ever since Bloodcloud Hall had appeared in the world of the Grand Xia, they had delivered talismans to the various supreme marquises, clans, tribes, and sects. Through the talisman, one could reach out to Bloodcloud Hall and go to the legendary 'Bloodcloud Hall world'. There, they could offer treasures and sign agreements. Bloodcloud Hall would then go kill their targets.

If the mission failed, Bloodcloud Hall would try again. If Bloodcloud Hall chose to give up the mission, they would return all the treasures taken.

If they succeeded...neither side would owe the other anything.

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There was another power, one known as the Seamless Gate.

This was a power that was far more mysterious than Bloodcloud Hall. The Seamless Gate had also revealed traces of itself in the world of the Grand Xia roughly thirty years ago. They had furiously stirred up trouble throughout the entire world; for example, here in Stillwater Commandery, they had gifted the Blood God Church, which had always felt hatred

towards the Northmont clan of Stillwater, with secret arts and treasures so as to help them grow much stronger.

In the past, the Blood God Church had been weak, and so the Blood God Church had suppressed its hatred for the Northmont clan. Now that they had grown powerful, and with the blandishments of the Seamless Gate... they had instantly begun to launch frenzied attacks.

The Seamless Gate had moved to seduce many powers in many places.

They would bestow treasures and secret arts...and would reward those who killed powerful figures! The more merits their supporters rendered, the more gifts they would bestow.

“What is this Seamless Gate trying to do?” Ning read through the intelligence report. He couldn’t help but feel dazed and tongue-tied. “They are causing so much trouble in the entire world of the Grand Xia...they are causing everyone to kill as many people as possible, and the more one kills, the more treasures and secret arts one would acquire?”

No one knew where the headquarters of the Seamless Gate was located.

In fact, no one had even located a gathering point for the Seamless Gate. The seduced powers all had to wait for the envoys of the Seamless Gate to personally come visit them.

The Seamless Gate was extremely powerful...their white-robed envoys were all Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals, while their golden-robed envoys were Celestial Immortals. More than three hundred different Celestial Immortals had already been verified!

“Three hundred?!” A look of utter shock appeared on Ning’s face as he read this figure.

Terrifying. Utterly terrifying!

During the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, just a thousand or so Celestial Immortals had come from throughout the Grand Xia Dynasty to the main hall of the Skylight Palace. Of course, there were even more who had remained at home, declining to participate, such as Celestial Immortals Hunchmont and Unity. The Youngflame clan, in turn, had only

sent Patriarch Arcanum.

The entire Grand Xia Dynasty most likely had several thousand Celestial Immortals, perhaps even as many as ten thousand.

But...

They represented the full force available to all the marquises, schools, and sects. They weren't necessarily part of the imperial clan's power! There was a limit to how powerful the imperial clan was, and in fact there had even been rebellions led by marquises in the past. Even powers like the Northmont clan of Stillwater were acting in a low-key manner, watching passively as events unfolded. There was no way they would act in an insane manner and go serve as cannon fodder for the imperial clan.

"We have already discovered more than three hundred Celestial Immortals under this single organization, the Seamless Gate. In the entire Grand Xia Dynasty, aside from them, most likely only the imperial clan is this powerful. None of the other clans or tribes are so strong.' Ning was secretly amazed by this. "No wonder not even the Xia Emperor dares to act rashly; after all, the three hundred-plus so-called 'golden-robed envoys' are merely 'envoys'; they don't represent the Seamless Gate's full power."

.....

Bloodcloud Hall was willing to kill anyone for treasures; even the imperial Xia clan could hire them to take on assassination missions.

The Seamless Gate stirred up trouble throughout the world, causing chaos everywhere. But no one knew anything about the true power, headquarters, or gathering points for the Seamless Gate.

.....

Aside from these two major powers, there were other hidden powers as well...but they were even more low-key, showing very few traces of themselves. These two major powers were too brash; naturally, there was a bit more information regarding them.

Be it the already-revealed Bloodcloud Hall and Seamless Gate, or those

other hidden powers...

They shared a commonality.

They all appeared roughly thirty years ago!

“No wonder the Xia Emperor is being so cautious. Bloodcloud Hall and the Seamless Gate are already terrifyingly powerful...much less the other hidden powers,” Ning mused to himself. By now, he had finished reading the book.

“Don’t worry too much,” the silver-haired man laughed. “The person who controls this world of the Grand Xia is still his Imperial Majesty! These powers that are causing trouble in secret, such as the Seamless Gate...if they truly had the power to shake the imperial clan, they wouldn’t be hiding around furtively, not daring to show their faces, nor would they act in such indirect ways.”

Ning was momentarily startled, but a moment later he nodded. “Right. I understand.”

It made sense. Even the likes of the Northmont clan of Stillwater had secret powers behind them such as Patriarch Unity. As the controller of this entire major world, and as the Grand Xia Emperor who came from the imperial clan of the Primordial Era...how much power had the Xia Emperor built up over the countless ages? The control the Grand Xia Emperor had over this entire world was extremely deep. Just look at the Raindragon Guard!

Every single commandery city had a Raindragon Guard branch, and every single Raindragon Guard branch was comparable in power to the local marquis.

The Raindragon Guard, as a whole, possessed utterly enormous power!

“His Imperial Majesty was able to bring an end to the era of Fiendgods in this world; he’s not someone that these minor powers are capable of shaking. The storm has yet to truly come; this is nothing but a bit of wind and a few sprinkles of rain.” The silver-haired man smiled as he looked at Ning. “I imagine, Ji Ning, that you now understand things a bit better, and

also see clearly the overall state of affairs here in the world of the Grand Xia.”

“Right.” Ning nodded. “Thank you, senior Skyfox. Oh...I should be thanking his Imperial Majesty for allowing me to see this intelligence report. If it wasn’t for this report, I would have no idea about what Bloodcloud Hall was, to say nothing of the Seamless Gate.”

“If there’s anything you need, you can go to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia and seek me out,” the silver-haired man said with a laugh. “I’ll naturally do my best to help out.”

“Definitely.” Ning nodded, then suddenly asked, “Right, has there been any news of my senior apprentice-sister, Yu Wei?”

“After Yu Wei accompanied Patriarch Lu in leaving the world of the Grand Xia more than thirty years ago, she has yet to return. I imagine she is still training,” the silver-haired man said.

.....

Ning led Uncle White out of Stillwater City, returning to Swallow Mountain.

On this trip to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, he had gotten the answer he had come for; the Ba-Serpent Formation was a formation often used by the assassins of Bloodcloud Hall. The twelve who had tried to assassinate Ning were then most likely assassins of Bloodcloud Hall. As for who had invited Bloodcloud Hall to do the deed...the first thought Ning had was of the Youngflame clan. Aside from them, Ning could think of no others.

After returning to Swallow Mountain, Uncle White continued to lay down new formations. He had previously only laid down a single one of the supreme killing formations; there were two more that had yet to be laid down. As for Ning, he focused on comprehending the Dao and training. He would alternate between working on his sword-arts and training archery, in accordance with [Houyi’s Archery].

.....

Ning was living a peaceful life, but the world of the Grand Xia as a whole wasn't peaceful at all.

In almost every commandery, and even in the four seas, the Seamless Gate continuously fanned the flames of chaos. Everyone, including the members of the imperial Xia clan as well as the various marquisates, began to grow cautious. This was because they couldn't tell who their enemy was; in fact, they couldn't even find out where their enemy was located.

And during this period of time...the Youngflame clan was investigating Ji Ning.

"Even Bloodcloud Hall demanded twenty top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures! Although they went too far in what they asked for, based on how Bloodcloud Hall usually prices their assassination missions, this high request suggests exactly how difficult the target is to deal with. Ji Ning's power must be even greater than what we believed it to be; otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to withstand Bloodcloud Hall's first attempt."

"In thirty or so short years, he has increased his power immeasurably, compared to back during the Conclave of Immortal Destiny. If he is permitted to continue to develop like this...I'm afraid that in thirty more years, it will be extremely difficult for our Youngflame clan to kill him."

"He has to be eliminated as soon as possible. Otherwise...he will cause a disaster."

"Since Bloodcloud Hall has named such a high price...let's do it ourselves. We have to succeed on our first try."

"Right. We have to plan this perfectly; we need to treat Ji Ning as we would a supreme Celestial Immortal."

Everyone within the Youngflame clan acknowledged the threat Ji Ning posed to them. In truth, ever since the Youngflame clan sent people to attempt to wipe out the Ji clan, the hatred between the two sides had increased to a very high level. The assassination attempt in the imperial capital of the Grand Xia caused this feud to become even more difficult to

result.

As for this assassination attempt by Bloodcloud Hall, since Ji Ning had no other major enemies in the Grand Xia Dynasty aside from the Youngflame clan, he would probably quickly arrive at the right conclusion...

“Get rid of him.”

“Get rid of him as soon as possible.”

The Youngflame clan began their investigations, but Swallow Mountain was completely impregnable. The terrifying formations surrounding it were even more frightening than the ones surrounding the Youngflame clan’s headquarters.

“There’s no way to assassinate him within Swallow Mountain.”

“Ji Ning is in Swallow Mountain right now. We have to wait.”

“Let’s wait.”

.....

Ning’s life in Swallow Mountain was quite relaxed. No matter how much turmoil there was in the outside world, he just quietly trained at home.

Winter passed. Spring came. Then summer. Then late autumn.

Ning stayed at Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain this entire time!

Actually, this entire time, Ning had wanted to make a trip to the Eastwoods mountain range; after all, he had suffered an attack there, and that was the only base belonging to the mysterious power that he knew about. In addition, based on what he saw, he believed that his opponents shouldn’t be able to do anything to him. He naturally wanted to go back! And by relying on his Seventy-Two Transformations, there was no need for him to worry about his identity being exposed; he could effortlessly penetrate their defenses.

But...

Ning hadn’t gone. This was because he was waiting for something; for

his breakthrough in the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]! He had reached the fifteenth level of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] more than ten years ago; during recent years, aside from training in sword-arts and archery, he also trained in the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] every single day. Because of the power of his body, energy from the Solar Star and the Lunar Star was filling his body at a truly shocking rate...but at his current level, each new breakthrough required a similarly shocking amount of divine power. However, Ning could feel as though his breakthrough was coming soon.

This was why he had refrained from going to the Eastwoods mountain range; after he made a new breakthrough and his power increased dramatically, he would have a better chance in his investigations!

“Autumn Leaf, I’m going to rest a bit on the lake. I’ll come back at night. Prepare some good food,” Ning said with a grin.

“Right.” Autumn Leaf nodded repeatedly.

Ning was standing by the beach. As he waved his hand, a little boat appeared on the surface of the lake. Ning took a single step forward, stepping into the boat. The little boat then floated away towards the depths of Serpentwing Lake.

Autumn Leaf watched from afar. After watching for quite some time, she saw that Ning had completely disappeared within the distant mist. Only then did she turn and go back home.

.....

The boat floated on the lake. Ning lay down within the boat, almost subconsciously beginning to absorb energy from the Solar Star and the Lunar Star.

Suddenly...as if sensing something, Ning opened his eyes. He could sense that the divine power in his body had reached a limit. He was about to make his breakthrough! He immediately rose to his feet, then took a single step forward, leaving the little boat and coming to stand on the waters of the lake.

Rumble...

Rumble...

From infinitely far away, the two Supreme Stars in the void, the Solar Star and the Lunar Star, instantly began to transmit their power through the void, all the way down until it reached Ji Ning's body...

Chapter 28: Just a Tenth

The Divine Solar Tattoo and Divine Lunar Tattoo on Ji Ning's back began to become even more profound and complicated. They were shining brightly, and in the area around Ning, a golden crow that was surrounded by flames began to fly about in a circling manner. At the same time, a jade rabbit appeared as well, filled with an icy aura as it stared upwards into the void, as though seeing the Lunar Star deep within the depths of infinity.

The distant Solar Star and Lunar Star continued to transmit a large amount of Lunar Truewater and Solar Truefire.

Whoooooosh.

Water and fire meshed together like threads being woven into a fabric. Soon, Ning became completely surrounded by them, as though he was within a giant egg. Within the egg, through a mysterious method that Ning couldn't understand, energy was being transmitted straight into his body, rapidly and frantically changing it. His body once more began a fundamental transformation, a transformation brought on by advancing to a separate level in power. Even his Divine Solar Tattoo and Divine Lunar Tattoo were beginning to transform.

.....

Above the calm surface of Serpentwing Lake, a three meter high 'egg' was hovering in the air. One could vaguely make out that the egg was bi-colored. Although it emanated an invisible field of terrifying power, it didn't disturb the surface of the water in the slightest.

Slowly...

The eggshell grew increasingly thin and translucent. In fact, one could even vaguely make out a human figure within it. Finally, the eggshell completely vanished, and a completely naked youth appeared, standing on the surface of the lake. Moments later, his body became covered with an exquisitely sewn set of fur clothes.

“Whew. I’ve finally reached the sixteenth stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens].” Ning let out a sigh of relief. “I should now be comparable to an ordinary late Void-level Fiendgod Body Refiner; before my Fiendgod tribulation comes, I can at most train to the seventeenth stage. I’m very close to my maximum level of power possible, prior to my tribulation.”

Once one reached the eighteenth stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens], the Empyrean Tribulation would quickly descend. Thus, prior to attempting the tribulation, one could at most train to the seventeenth stage.

Today’s breakthrough represented an advance to a major new level. It had thus involved a fundamental transformation.

Previously, Ning could at most train to the Third Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], because his divine body had reached a limit in power; there was no way it could withstand any further strengthening. But now that Ning’s divine body had fundamentally been transformed, he could train all the way up to the Sixth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]! Alas...the price one would need to pay to reach the Sixth Cycle was more than a thousandfold the price one needed for the Third Cycle!

The Ninth Cycle, in turn, needed roughly a thousand times as many materials as the Sixth Cycle! The price was heart-clenchingly high. Even Ning’s senior apprentice-brother, Empyrean God Silvermoon, had merely trained to the Sixth Cycle. The number of people in the Three Realms who had reached the Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] could be counted on one hand; they were even rarer than Daofathers or True Gods!

“For a Fiendgod Body Refiner to advance from the early Void level to the late Void level represents advancing across two small stages.” Ning mused to himself, “I imagine that by now, my close combat power is probably superior to my power as a Ki Refiner.”

Previously, as a Ki Refiner, he could rely on his [Heavenraker] sword formation, which was somewhat more powerful than his close combat abilities. But Ning’s divine body was now far too powerful! It must be

understood that Fiendgod Body Refiners were powerful to begin with, and Ning was now comparable to late Void-level Fiendgods...and he also had the [Starseizing Hand]! In terms of raw strength alone, when he went all out, he was even stronger than Celestial Immortals. With the Thousandbull Sword and his various sword-arts...he would now be considered a formidable figure, even amongst Celestial Immortals. He was definitely better now than he was in the past, where he would be considered a fairly low-class Celestial Immortal.

After making his breakthrough, Ning continued to lie there within his little boat, floating across the surface of Serpentwing Lake.

It was like he was 'showing off' to his parents after having accomplished something significant, in the hopes of earning a word of praise from them. After increasing his level of power, Ning simply floated there in the waters of Serpentwing Lake. He felt like he was by the side of his parents; he wanted to let them see how strong he had become. The gentle sounds of the waves were like the voices of his mother and father.

"My power has increased greatly after having gone to Mount Innerheart. It is time to take a look into what happened with my parents after they reincarnated," Ning mused to himself.

After death, reincarnation.

Ning naturally had been thinking about this for quite some time now. He wanted to look into this matter. As for his parents from his previous life? Ning wanted to look into what happened to them as well. However, in the past, Ning was simply too weak; there was no way he could investigate them at all. Now, Ning could be somewhat considered a 'powerful' figure. Still...this was not an era of peace. In a peaceful era, everything was under the control of the Netherworld Kingdom, making investigations fairly simple. The Six Cycles of Reincarnation, however, had been destroyed; it would now be far more difficult to investigate anything.

Late night.

Ning returned to Brightmoon Island. After joining Uncle White, Little

Qing, and Autumn Leaf in eating some delicacies which Autumn Leaf had personally prepared, Ning once more quietly slipped into his underwater estate.

.....

The underwater estate.

The giant yellow bear looked at Ning, then laughed. "Congratulations. You've broken through to the sixteenth stage as a Fiendgod Body Refiner; this is a major leap for you. You now have two more chances to attempt the Wargod Hall, and can also choose yet another item from the Treasures Hall. And...I have to say, you've grown remarkably patient. You were actually able to wait until nightfall before coming here, after you made a break through."

Ning just chuckled. He then asked, "Last time, I overcame the eighth floor of the Wargod Hall; the ninth and tenth floor now await me. Senior, how good are my chances for attempting the ninth floor?"

"Ninth floor? Mm...if your true body and your Primaltwin join forces, you'd just barely have a tenth of a chance, I suppose," the giant yellow bear said.

"Just a tenth?" Ning was surprised.

He felt that he would be considered formidable even amongst Celestial Immortals by now...and he also had the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] protecting him.

"How good of a chance did you think you'd have? When you overcome the ninth and tenth floors, you'll receive a Pure Yang treasure," the giant yellow bear said. "The seventh and eighth floor have Immortal-ranked treasures as their rewards, but these two have Pure Yang treasures; naturally, the difficulty level will have risen exponentially. Based on my estimations...one needs to have the power of a supreme Celestial Immortal to be absolutely sure of overcoming the ninth floor. As for the tenth floor...you'll need to have close to the level of a Pure Yang True Immortal to overcome it."

Ning blinked.

The ninth floor...a supreme Celestial Immortal?

The tenth floor...close to a Pure Yang True Immortal?

Ning knew his own limits. It must be understood that there was a huge gap between mastering the [Three-Foot Sword] and mastering the Grand Dao of the Sword. Thus, although in sword-arts Ning would be considered formidable amongst Celestial Immortals and would not be considered weak, he was still quite a ways off from the true peak of power. Most likely, Patriarch Unity had the strength of a supreme Celestial Immortal.

“Fine, I won’t try it for now. After all...I only have two chances before becoming an Empyrean God,” Ning said. “Senior, let’s go. Let’s go to the Treasures Hall; I want to choose my treasure.”

“You should be careful in making this choice. You wouldn’t be able to use a Pure Yang treasure right now, even if I gave one to you...so the most important thing for you right now is a good Immortal-ranked magic treasure. This is your third time choosing one, and so I’ll bring out all the Immortal-ranked magic treasures which Master left behind and let you choose from them.” As the giant yellow bear spoke, he led Ning to the Treasures Hall.

The many magic treasures within the hall were still levitating high up in the air, emanating powerful ripples of majesty.

However...to the current Ning, the ripples of power were virtually negligible. He was now able to forcibly seize even Pure Yang treasures.

“Mm, here is the list for all the Immortal-ranked treasures.” The giant yellow bear gave Ning a thick tome listing many treasures.

Ning immediately lowered his head, beginning to flip through it.

He had already chosen two Immortal-ranked magic treasures; the first time, he had chosen the Tripartite Immortal-Locking Circlet, which was a high-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasure which he had chosen for the express purpose of giving it to Uncle White, which he had done so long ago. The second time, he had chosen those nine top-grade Immortal-

ranked swords that could join together into the [Heavenraker] sword-formation; clearly, this was a much finer treasure. As for this third time... all of the Immortal-ranked magic treasures were now available for his perusing.

“Wow.”

“These things are way better than the Heavenraker swords.” Ning was speechless at what he saw.

Although the Heavenraker swords were excellent...compared to the truly top-notch Immortal-ranked items which Daoist Threelives had collected, they were far inferior. After all, those nine swords were template-produced items.

“These are all the very best available; most likely, in the current Three Realms, they would be considered amongst the most exquisite of Immortal-ranked treasures. When leaving them behind, Master elected not to break up any of the sets,” the nearby giant yellow bear said.

Ning’s eyes were shining with glee as he read through the book.

For example, this one!

A Pentabolt Ship of Cosmic Light: A top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasure that could move extremely fast, as fast as an Empyrean God or True Immortal! And once one filled it with elemental ki, Pentabolts of Cosmic Light could be used to attack the enemy.

Pentabolts of Cosmic Light were comparable to the Divine Venomflame of the Nine Heavens in power. If one hid within the ship, the enemies would be unable to do anything to you, while you could release Pentabolts of Cosmic Light to strike your opponent at your leisure! Even the vast majority of Celestial Immortals would perish under such a wild assault; after all, there were very few who were like Ning, who had trained in something that was as protective as the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. This item alone was definitely no less valuable than a Pure Yang treasure! This was because there were very few Pure Yang treasures that were capable of unleashing Pentabolts of Cosmic Light.

.....

“This one. This is absolutely...” Ning’s eyes were absolutely huge right now.

Tiangang Disha net formation 1 : This was a terrifying, large formation that was formed by 3600 top-grade Immortal-ranked flying knives! Once the enemy was trapped within the formation, the 3600 flying knives would wildly attack from every direction, in such a flurry that they would be almost impossible to block. The flying knives themselves would also be supported by the mysteries of the formation. This set was so powerful that if a Celestial Immortal were to possess it, it would be enough for him to arrogantly roam the realms as he pleased. A grand formation composed of so many top-grade Immortal-ranked flying knives...no one would be so foolish as to accept even a standard Pure Yang treasure in exchange for it!

“Senior, these 3600 top-grade Immortal-ranked flying knives...they are considered ‘one set’?!” Ning couldn’t believe it.

Although the value of a flying knife was generally a bit lower than a flying sword...3600 flying knives were equivalent to hundreds of flying swords. And the Heavenraker swords were merely a set of nine!

“Of course. There are plenty of fine treasures here. In short, all of the fine Immortal-ranked treasures which Master ever acquired have been left here. Just keep looking,” the giant yellow bear said.

.....

“Myriad Extermination Needles!” Flipping through the book, Ning found the set with the highest number of top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures.

There was a full myriad of flying needles! Ten thousand flying needles, all contained within a needle-box. The needle-box itself was already an extremely valuable top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasure which had a Dao-diagram within it. When battle began, one would open the box, and countless flying needles would come flying out...and the power of the Dao-diagram was truly terrifying as well.

.....

“Stellar Revolutions sword-formation? Pretty formidable...but it'd be better if it had more flying swords.”

The Stellar Revolutions sword-formation consisted of 360 top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords that were specially forged in order to unleash the Grand Stellar Revolutions formation. Once activated, every single sword would seem to have transformed into a star as it smashed down towards the foe.

.....

Ning was completely intoxicated as he flipped through the supreme Immortal-ranked magic treasures he found within this tome. These were the items which Daoist Threelives had collected for the express purpose of passing them down to his successors; they weren't meant for any single person, but rather an entire generation of successors. Thus, he naturally had to prepare quite a few items.

*

1. Tiangang Disha is a very hard term to translate that comes from the legendary Chinese novel, the 'Water Margin'. There are 36 'Tiangang', which literally translates into 'celestial stars (of the Big Dipper)', and 72 'Disha', which literally translates into 'terrestrial fiends'. In the Water Margin, they were a group of 108 demons that were banished but managed to escape, and were reborn into outlaw heroes that fought for justice. Suikoden's '108 Stars of Destiny' and Saint Seiya's '108 Specters' all fundamentally derive from this tale.

Chapter 29: Preparing to Head Out

“Choose carefully,” the giant yellow bear said with a smirk. “When you come choose Pure Yang treasures, you’ll have to wait until your third shot before you once more see such an awesome display.”

Ji Ning nodded. He understood this, of course. The first time he had chosen Immortal-ranked magic treasures, he had only been able to choose a high-grade treasure, the Tripartite Immortal-Locking Circlet. Only on the second time had he been given the option of choosing the set of Heavenraker swords. As for the third time...it had been completely different.

The first two times he would have to choose a Pure Yang treasure, he would have to overcome the ninth and tenth levels; the number of treasures would probably be limited. Only after becoming an Empyrean God would he have the third chance to choose Pure Yang treasures; only then would he have the chance to see the most powerful treasures on offer within the entire underwater estate.

But the prerequisite...becoming an Empyrean God!

Empyrean Gods were comparable to Pure Yang True Immortals in power. To become an Empyrean God, one would have to overcome nine nine-sets of the thunder tribulation. In addition, given how extraordinary Ning’s background was, with him being a successor to both Daoist Threelives and Patriarch Subhuti...his Empyrean Tribulation would probably be even more difficult than that of most Fiendgods. Thus, Ning didn’t dare to be the slightest bit overconfident.

“My [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] requires a total of 729 Immortal swords. Most likely, for the foreseeable future, I’ll be using top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords,” Ning mused to himself.

Even after he became a Celestial Immortal, it wasn’t very likely that he would be able to acquire more than seven hundred Pure Yang treasures, even if he was able to acquire a few.

He had to become an Empyrean God. The third chance to choose a Pure

Yang treasure from the underwater estate's Treasure Hall...perhaps there would be a chance. Just a chance! After all, Daoist Threelives had merely left behind some of his stored items; he didn't necessarily have nearly a thousand Pure Yang flying swords that he could leave behind for use in a formation!

And in addition, becoming an Empyrean God was far too distant a goal!

As Ning planned it, he definitely had to let his Primaltwin undergo its tribulation first; only then would he let his true body undergo the Celestial Tribulation. This was because his Primaltwin was merely a Ki Refiner; its tribulation would be a bit easier. As for his true body, a Fiendgod Body Refiner...its tribulation would be utterly terrifying. Since he knew that, he naturally wasn't going to let his true body and his Primaltwin undergo tribulations simultaneously. Ning didn't even dare imagine how terrifying the Celestial Tribulation would be if he did!

In addition, back when he was living on Mount Innerheart, Ning had often chatted with his senior apprentice-brother Silvermoon and the others. His various senior apprentice-brothers had all advised him to have his Primaltwin be the first to undergo the tribulation. That way, it would first enter the Celestial Immortal stage, allowing him to comprehend the Grand Dao of the Sword at a faster rate. Once his level of insight into it became higher...after his preparations were more thorough...only then would his true body undergo the tribulation.

.....

"The Three Realms are in a state of chaos. I'll be relying on this final set of flying swords to protect myself! I'll also be using them to withstand the Celestial Tribulation!" Ning was extremely cautious and careful as he flipped through the book, reading each page carefully. He saw many formidable sets of powerful top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, but unfortunately there were no sets of nearly a thousand top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords.

But suddenly, his eyes lit up and came to a halt.

"There it is." Ning revealed a look of delight.

The Yin-Yang Duality Thousand Supremes Formation: A sword-formation formed by a set of five hundred extremely Yin-aligned 'Sole-Ki Frost Swords' and five hundred extremely Yang-aligned 'Qiangang Inferno Swords'. They could combine into the Yin-Yang Duality Thousand Supremes Formation; once formed, Yin and Yang would intersect and fire and water would converge, annihilating all things. All of the swords were top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords; they could be controlled by two different people at the same time, with one controlling the five hundred Sole-Ki Frost Swords and the other controlling the five hundred Qiangang Inferno Swords, with the two working together to set up the formation. However, all thousand swords could be used by a single person to establish the formation as well.

The book had quite a few mysteries recorded within it. In fact, it even recorded one of the major formations that could be used with this Yin-Yang Duality Thousand Supremes Formation.

However, there were some things regarding this formation that were never recorded down. In truth, this sword-formation had originally been controlled by a pair of Celestial Immortal Dao-companions. The female Immortal controlled the Sole-Ki Frost Swords, while the male Immortal had controlled the Qiangang Inferno Swords.

Controlling this many top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords was simply too mentally exhausting; there were very few individuals, even amongst Celestial Immortals, who would be able to control a thousand of these top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords to set up the Yin-Yang Duality Thousand Supremes Formation.

"This formation is far too difficult." Ning's face couldn't help but change as he read through it. "Although this formation uses swords, it actually places a higher burden with regards to understanding the Dao of Formations. These precious Immortal swords are actually merely used as markers to position the formation; what a waste of fine swords!"

There were many Immortals who used swords, but they weren't necessarily Sword Immortals!

For example, Immortal Fivecraze was a wielder of Immortal swords, while Little Qing's weapon of choice was also an Immortal sword. Most likely, more than half of the Loose Immortals alive all used Immortal swords as their weapon of choice...but less than one in a thousand of them were Sword Immortals! In this Yin-Yang Duality Formation, every single sword served as a formation-base, allowing the establishing of a truly enormous formation of unearthly power.

"Only in my hands shall you truly be able to unleash the power of a 'sword'," Ning murmured to himself.

Ning continued to read.

Soon, he finished reading the entire book. This book had notes on quite a few sets of Immortal swords, but there were only two sets of sword-formations that included more than 729 swords! The swords of the Yin-Yang Duality Thousand Supremes Formation were divided into Yin and Yang; in terms of the Dao of Formations, Ning just so happened to be fairly skilled in harmonizing Yin and Yang, and so he ended up choosing this set.

"This'll be the one," Ning said with a smile.

The underwater estate. The Stellar Hall.

Ning was seated in the lotus position within the thatched cottage, holding an Immortal sword that was emanating an icy cold aura. A small, snow-white snake suddenly appeared on the surface of the Immortal sword. "Are you the master of myself and my many sisters?"

"Sisters?" Ning smiled as he gave this snow-white snake a glance.

"All five hundred of us Sole-Ki Frost Swords are dear sisters to each other," the little white snake said, "While those five hundred Qiangang Inferno Swords are our rowdy brothers."

Ning laughed. He pointed towards the empty air and elemental ki flew out from his finger, forming into a series of runes. These runes emanated a blurry, dark light as they simply hung there in the air. These had been taught to Ning by his master, Patriarch Subhuti, in transmitting the

technique for the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation]; the Old Patriarch had used up an enormous amount of energy in developing them.

Moments later, more than ten thousand runes had appeared in midair, forming into a strange, enormous Fiendgod character, 'thousand'.

"Condense." Ning activated his elemental ki one more time. Instantly, all of the many runes joined together, transforming into a single rune of incomparable complexity; this was the 'Greater Thousand Rune'. This, too, was a simple rune-fusing technique which the Old Patriarch had taught him. An expert in runes would be able to instantly generate this Greater Thousand Rune; Ning, by contrast, had to first manifest each of the small runes.

"Combine." Ning slapped his palm against the Greater Thousand Rune, then slapped the side of the Immortal sword, pressing them together.

The blade of the sword instantly began to manifest a distorted yet complicated pattern of runes on it, and it seemed as though the aura of this Immortal sword had grown sharper as well.

"One down. Another!" Ning continued to create his runes.

One Immortal sword after another was retrofitted by Ning. To the current Ning, the runes of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] could probably be generated with a single thought and within a single breath as he imprinted all the swords with the Lesser Thousand Rune. However, this Greater Thousand Rune that was created based off the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] and other exceptional skills that involved many treasures was a far more complicated creature. Just setting up a single Greater Thousand Rune required more than ten thousand smaller runes; every single one of them far more complicated than the Lesser Thousand Rune.

He spent a total of three days before finally imprinting the last of the 729 Immortal swords with the Greater Thousand Rune. As for the remaining 200+ swords, Ning temporarily put them away.

"Arise, my [Greater Thousand Swords Formation]!"

Ning tested time and time again, but he realized that even with the help of the Greater Thousand Runes, and even though the many Immortal swords would resonate together as if they were one...his true body and his Primaltwin, combined, were at most only able to unleash the second level of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation], controlling 182 top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords! This was a maximum limit, and if his true body needed to also spend some of its attention on close combat...at most, he would be able to unleash the first level of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation].

“What terrifying power.”

The hundred-plus top-grade Immortal-ranked flying swords, even without using any formations, just chopping wildly, still made for an awe-inspiring sight.

By relying on the power of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation], they could merge their power together.

In an instant, Ning’s power as a Ki Refiner once more surpassed his true body’s close combat power as a Fiendgod Refiner!

After making his breakthrough, Ning remained at Swallow Mountain for a few more times, carefully testing his close combat power and his [Greater Thousand Swords Formation]. After stabilizing at his latest level of power...Ning finally left Swallow Mountain.

.....

Flamedoor Commandery. The air above Weirflow City.

It was dawn. The air above Weirflow was cold and crisp. A faint spatial ripple suddenly appeared, then a fur-clad youth emerged from within it.

This time, Ning had come alone, primarily because he was relying on the ‘Seventy-Two Transformations’ for his investigations; it wouldn’t be appropriate for him to bring Uncle White and the others.

“Last time, I fled a million kilometers through teleportation; I ended up arriving here, at Weirflow. My original predictions was the mountain range I was in was the Eastwoods mountain range, but I don’t know if

that was a correct guess or not.” Ning smiled. “Time to go test it.”

Swoosh!

Ning flew straight towards the direction he had fled from previously. While flying, he would occasionally do a short ten-kilometer teleportation. Soon, Ning verified that his original hypothesis was indeed correct; that place was indeed the Eastwoods mountain range of the Eastwoods Sect.

“The Eastwoods Sect?”

“How should I get in?”

“Should I change into a bug? But the Eastwoods mountain range is protected by formations; if a mosquito or bug was able to break through it, others would probably notice.” Ning frowned in a pondering manner... then decided to begin the area surrounding the Eastwoods mountain range. “I refuse to believe that not a single disciple of a major school such as this would enter or leave from time to time!”

.....

Ning first went to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to buy some reports regarding the experts of the Eastwoods Sect, so that he might be able to recognize their important figures. Ning then set up watch outside the Eastwoods mountain range, often using the [Torch-Dragon’s Eye] to search the surrounding area.

Ning searched for three full days.

“We are venerable Primal Daoists, but we are now in such a sorry state that all we can do is act as messenger dogs and servants. We have to buy Immortal nectar, Immortal fruit, and all sorts of other queer marvels and strange beasts to be butchered and cooked. How sad!” A large warship descended, and two Immortal practitioners walked out from within it, walking side-by-side, chatting mentally to each other. They were so cautious that they used mental messages to carry out their grumblings.

“Even the sect leader is summoned willy nilly by them; what can Primal Daoists like us do about it? Forget it. Just endure it. Didn’t that general

himself say that he would definitely leave within a thousand years and give us our freedom back?”

“We’ll probably have died before then.”

The two Primal Daoists were complaining. Tens of thousands of kilometers away from them, there sat a fur-clad youth in the lotus position. His eyes were glowing with torch-light, and as he saw them from afar, a look of delight instantly appeared on his face. “Hey, aren’t those two the Primal Daoists of the Eastwoods Sect? I knew it; an enormous clan that’s taken up a hundred thousand kilometers of space definitely has people entering and leaving it. It seems I need to rely on them to get inside.”

Ning suddenly disappeared as he executed a void blink, stealthily moving closer to them.

Chapter 30: Within the Eastwoods Sect

The two Primal Daoists walked forward, shoulder-to-shoulder. Suddenly, a light flashed in front of them, then a fur-clad youth appeared out of nowhere.

“Who are you?” The faces of the two Primal Daoists changed as they shouted simultaneously.

Boom! An incomparably terrifying majesty swept out from Ji Ning’s body, and space within three thousand meters became completely frozen.

The wind halted. The swaying grass froze mid-sway. The hopping grasshoppers paused mid-jump. The flowing waters of the nearby creek stopped in its tracks. Even the beads of water spraying into the air from the creek just hovered there.

The faces of the two Primal Daoists were completely filled with terror and shock...but they, too, were completely unable to move. When that terrifying Dao Domain descended, they were completely unable to resist at all.

Back when he had been in the Crescent world, Ning had been able to use his Dao Domain to easily render a squad of Flamewing Guards completely helpless. By comparison, these two Primal Daoists were actually slightly weaker than the Flamewing Guards.

“In you go.” Ning waved his hand, and an irresistible force drew those two individuals into his mobile Immortal estate.

Ning swept the surrounding region with his gaze; when making his move, he had been extremely cautious. He had kept his Dao Domain to a radius of merely three thousand meters, not affecting the area beyond this region at all.

.....

Within his mobile Immortal estate.

The two Primal Daoists stared at their surroundings in terror.

“What is this place?”

“Where are we?! This...can this be a mobile Immortal estate?!” The two Primal Daoists, upon viewing their surroundings, could only think of this one possibility.

“Easthill, who was that youth? How is it that he was able to render us completely helpless merely through using his Dao Domain? Can he be a Celestial Immortal?”

“He most likely is on their level.”

These two Primordial Daoists were filled with terror and worry. The enemy’s power was simply too great; they weren’t able to fight back against him at all. Not even the more powerful Loose Immortals of their Eastwoods Sect was capable of using a simple Dao Domain to render them completely helpless; clearly, this youth’s Dao Domain had surpassed that of virtually every single member of the Eastwoods Sect.

“The two of you.” The black-robed Ning appeared.

“Senior, why have you seized the two of us?” One of the two Primal Daoists, a tall, skinny man, hurriedly spoke out.

“Senior, if there’s anything you need from us, just tell us,” the other Primal Daoist, a man with triangular pupils, said quickly.

The black-robed Ning smiled. “It is simple. I want to soulscour the two of you.”

“Soulscur?! ” The two instantly revealed looks of terror.

Soulscouring. If one was lucky, one might be able to maintain their ordinary faculties, at most losing a few of their memories. But if one was unlucky...they might be turned into idiots!

“The two of you should know that killing you is effortless for me,” the black-robed Ning said. “I can forcibly soulscour you, but as you should know, doing that would be quite damaging to you, possibly resulting in the two of you being turned into idiots. Thus...I hope that the two of you will accept it and won’t fight back. That way...your Primal-level souls

should be able to maintain normalcy.”

The two Primal Daoists exchanged a glance.

They felt helpless.

Why were they so damn unlucky?

They knew very well that if they were to resist and be forcibly soulscoured...then things would be even more disastrous for them.

“We accept. Senior, please spare our lives,” the two said.

“Don’t worry. I won’t kill you,” the black-robed Ning said. In truth, based on the intelligence reports which Ning had received from the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, these two had done quite a few evil deeds. Given Ning’s usual temperament, he would’ve killed them long ago...but if he did, then the life-tablets of the two within the Eastwoods Sect would shatter, and the Sect would know that they died. Once that happened, his plan would fail.

The two Primal Daoists closed their eyes.

The black-robed Ning stretched out his hand, placing it atop the head of the tall, skinny Primal Daoist. He immediately used the ‘Thousand Stars Soulscour’ technique; this technique was a soulscouring technique which he had acquired in the Crescent world after killing that evil Patriarch.

Moments later...Ning lowered his hands.

A look of joy appeared within the eyes of the tall, skinny Primal Daoist. “I’m fine. I’m fine!”

“I told you. If you don’t resist at all, your soul will find it easier to maintain its normalcy, and in fact very few memories will be lost.” The black-robed Ning looked towards the other person, the triangle-pupiled Primal Daoist. That Primal Daoist closed his eyes as well, accepting the soulscouring. Ning walked over to him, placing his palm atop his head as well.

.....

At the base of the Eastwoods mountain range.

“So the two of them were so spineless,” Ning mused to himself. Waving his hand, he produced a sack that was filled with the items that had been purchased.

Roughly thirty years ago, the Eastwoods Sect had suffered a calamity. The majority of its tougher figures were all wiped out, while a few who were able to suppress their anger were able to survive. They all hoped for freedom to come. However...the Eastwoods Sect also had some spineless figures who even helped the mysterious power act against their fellow disciples!

Daoist Easthill and Daoist Eastharm were two such spineless figures! They abused their former ‘fellow disciples’, currying favor with the mysterious figures as if they were dogs!

Naturally, this resulted in the two of them being viewed with favor, and they were even allowed to go out and shop.

However...

Although they did their utmost to please, the mysterious power still viewed them as nothing more but dogs. They were absolutely forbidden from going near the most important ‘forbidden region’; in fact, even the Eastwoods sect leader was forbidden from entering it!

“A mysterious power?”

“The leader is a ‘general’? Supposedly at the Celestial Immortal level?”

“A forbidden region?”

After finishing the soulscouring, Ning immediately began to pay attention to this supposed ‘forbidden region’.

The forbidden region was simply too mysterious. After taking over the Eastwoods mountain range, the mysterious power had designed a certain part of it as a ‘forbidden region’, with many people being sent within it. In fact, even that ‘general’ would often go inside.

“Change!” Ning instantly changed, transforming into the appearance of that tall, skinny Primal Daoist – Daoist Easthill.

Ning immediately headed straight towards the entrance to the Eastwoods Sect.

“Daoist Easthill has returned? Where is Daoist Eastharm?” One of the two gate guards asked.

“It has been a long time since Daoist Eastharm returned to his tribe, so he made a side trip this time. I came back first,” Ning said with a smile. Due to the soulscouring, Ning now knew well that these spineless figures were rather trusted, and so they were often allowed to return to their tribes. That way, the spies of the imperial Xia clan wouldn’t notice anything strange about the Eastwoods Sect.

Otherwise...if all of a sudden, no members of the Eastwoods Sect were returning to their clans...in an era like this, when the Three Realms were in a state of turmoil, the imperial Xia clan would definitely investigate.

Ning smiled as he spoke, then walked in. In a very familiar manner, he walked through the various formations. He knew exactly how to bypass them, because of what he had learned through the soulscouring.

.....

Upon ‘returning’ to the Eastwoods Sect and handing over the purchased items, Ning chatted for a while with some of the cultivators of the Eastwoods Sect, then went to the residence of Daoist Easthill.

“Change!”

A mosquito flew out from Daoist Easthill’s residence.

Mosquitos were extremely common; even if one were to wipe out a swathe of them, the next night many more would most likely appear, especially since the Eastwoods Sect was located within a mountain forest. Ning, in the shape of a mosquito, flew closer and closer to the ‘forbidden region’.

The forbidden region was layered with increasingly powerful formations.

The mosquito-Ning was forced to come to a halt outside the formations,

landing on the ground.

“Step closely.

“Hurry up. Keep in line! We’re about to enter the formation. If you get out of line, you’ll be trapped within the eighteen great formations. I really don’t want to have to go find those guys and ask them to save you.” A group of black-robed figure was flying towards the formation, with the one in the very rear urging them to move faster.

Whap.

As they walked forward, the foot of one of the black-robed figures was stained with a speck of mud. This mud was the transformed Ning!

Not even Immortal cultivators would constantly use their power to dissipate the dust and mud from their feet with every step; how tiring would that be?! As the group of black-robed figures advanced through the region, carefully passing through all eighteen formations, the bit of ‘mud’ staining one of their feet was also brought through the eighteen formations.

After passing through the formations...they entered the ‘forbidden zone’. There were many roving patrols here.

Rumble...

The mosquito-Ning was flying through the forbidden region.

“This place truly is guarded tightly. What’s going on here?” The mosquito-Ning flew into a gorge with many mosquitos, maintaining the speed of an ordinary mosquito. “The deeper I go into this gorge, the tighter the guard becomes.”

Deep within the gorge, there was a castle.

The castle was covered with a layer of light which not even mosquitos could pass into. The number of black-robed figures patrolling this place was simply astonishing. All of them emanated auras of tremendous power, at least at the Earth Immortal or Loose Immortal level.

“Some of the black-robed figures are merely at the Wanxiang or Primal

level...but the ones guarding this castle are all Loose Immortals, and there are more than a hundred of them?” Ning was secretly speechless. More than a hundred Loose Immortals were standing guard outside; the number of true guardians must definitely be even greater.

“This castle...?” The mosquito-Ning landed, staring at the distant castle.

He waited until nightfall, until a group of gray-robed figures came walking out from within the castle.

“Finally, someone came out from the castle. These people have fairly powerful auras; they seem to all be Earth Immortals or Loose Immortals. Heeeey...why are they all...?”

Ning suddenly discovered, to his astonishment, that each of the gray-robed figures had looks of exhaustion on their faces. Their exhaustion was so evident that Ning could sense it from a great distance away.

“They are all Loose Immortals or Earth Immortals; how could they become so tired?” Ning couldn’t believe it; Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals had very strong minds. Only if their mental energy was utterly exhausted would they appear like this.

Mental exhaustion usually wasn’t that important to Immortals. But if it reached a certain level...it could become quite terrifying. For example, if an Immortal, in order to produce a powerful magic treasure, was to work day and night and use up all his blood and effort, he might even perish; this sort of event happened quite often within the Three Realms. Generally speaking, after Immortal cultivators grew tired, they would rest and relax for a time.

“How can they be so exhausted? And it’s not just one or two of them, but an entire group?” Ning was puzzled.

Suddenly...

Ning was stupefied!

Towards the back of that squad of gray-robed figures, there was a fairly small, skinny gray-robed figure who woodenly walked forward.

“Junior...junior apprentice-brother?!” Ning stared in disbelief. That gray-robed figure was Ning’s junior apprentice-brother, a person he was incomparably familiar with...it was Mu Northson, who had been missing for more than twenty years!

Mu Northson!

Years ago, he had found a Dao-companion and begun to enjoy a happy life. But soon...his Dao-companion perished, and he himself had vanished as well.

The Black-White College had searched for him but was unable to find him!

Ning had never imagined...that here, within the Eastwoods mountain range, he would run into his junior apprentice-brother! Even less did he imagine that his junior apprentice-brother would end up looking like this!

His body, beneath that gray robe, had become even thinner and frailer. He clearly had the aura of a Loose Immortal or Earth Immortal...but Ning could not sense any power at all coming from him. All he could sense was that his junior apprentice-brother was like a sputtering candle that could go out at any moment. His lifeforce was extremely weak, and waves of exhaustion flowed out from him.

The frailness was just a minor matter; what really mattered was that Ning couldn’t sense any vigor at all coming from his junior apprentice-brother. It seemed as though the vigorous, lively youth had completely disappeared, transforming into someone who seemed like an old man that was on the verge of death.

His face was ashen, and his hair was a complete mess. In fact, he even had quite a few white hairs.

“Junior apprentice-brother...” Ning felt that the white hairs were particularly painful for him to see.

For an Earth Immortal or Loose Immortal, there was only one reason a person would develop white hairs, unless they intentionally used a technique to change it; utter mental exhaustion. If one was utterly

mentally exhausted, one's hair might even turn completely white within a single night...or even perish.

“What on earth happened?” Ning was truly stunned.

His memories remained so clear and vivid...

“My name is Mu Northson?” That youthful white-robed youngster had been so full of vigor.

“My name is Ji Ning. I'm sixteen this year. How old are you?”

“Fourteen.”

That was their first meeting. That bashful, youthful figure...Ning remembered it all as if it was yesterday.

“Senior apprentice-brother, I'll go with you. Going with you and fleeing together is bound to be an exciting life.” When Ning had killed Youngflame Nong, his junior apprentice-brother had shown no hesitation at all; he had been filled with energy and determination, even in the face of life as a refugee.

“What...what in the world has caused junior apprentice-brother to become like this?”

Ning stared at the gray-robed Mu Northson...at the decrepit, exhausted Mu Northson.

.....

The group of gray-robed figures walked past. Mosquitos flew about within the gorge, with one of them flying behind the gray-robed figures.

“You only have two hours to rest,” a black-robed figure barked.

The group of gray-robed figures began to separate, each returning to his own residence. The gray-robed Northson began to move towards his residence, one of the many residences in this area. He pushed open the door, entered, then shut the door.

Within a room in his residence.

Northson sat in front of a wooden desk. He picked up a canteen of

water, pouring himself a cup, then began to quietly drink it.

It was quiet. Terrifyingly quiet.

The only sound within the room was that of the quiet gurgling of water. Northson then put the cup down silently, then sat there wordlessly, not saying a single thing. His gaze was straight forward.

Whoosh. Northson suddenly waved his hand, and a blocking formation suddenly appeared within the room. He then waved his hand again, and a wooden figurine appeared. This was the figurine of a woman, and it was very lifelike. Northson stared at the figurine, then placed it on the table. Waving his hand again, he produced another block of wood, then began to carve it with a small knife. He carved in a very slow manner, sending wood chips flying everywhere as the block of wood began to gradually be formed into a woman's appearance.

Finally, the sculpting was complete.

He placed the wooden sculpture on the desk, then stared at it. Simply stared at it in a daze.

"Junior apprentice-brother!" Suddenly, a voice rang out.

A fur-clad youth appeared within the room.

That familiar voice seemed to summon suppressed memories from deep within the soul of Mu Northson. He raised his head to look...and was suddenly arrested. His entire body became completely frozen. He just stared at the fur-clad youth who was standing there.

Those familiar furs...

That familiar appearance...

That familiar voice...

Those eyes...that gaze...

"Senior, senior apprentice-brother?" A very dry, rusted voice emerged from Northson's throat, as though it had been a long time since he had spoken.

“Junior apprentice-brother. Junior apprentice-brother!” Ning stared at his junior apprentice-brother, his eyes moist. “What has happened?”

Northson looked at Ning. Stared at him. His tears suddenly came cascading down. He opened his mouth, wanting to cry, but nothing came out. His body just shuddered, his tears continuing to flow.

Ning hurriedly stepped forward, embracing Northson.

“Cry, cry. Let it out. Don’t keep it suppressed in your heart. Let it all come out.” Ning’s own eyes were red as he spoke softly. He could sense the endless pain suppressed within his junior apprentice-brother’s heart. He couldn’t even imagine...he didn’t even want to imagine...what his junior apprentice-brother had experienced over these years. What in the world had caused his junior apprentice-brother, whose Dao-heart had been so strong, to become like this?

Ning could sense his junior apprentice-brother’s body trembling within his arms.

Ning felt as though his own heart was trembling as well!

What had happened?

What had happened!

Why had it ended up this way?

Why?

“Let it all come out. Don’t keep it suppressed in your heart. Cry it all out. Your senior apprentice-brother is here. Now that I’m here, it will all come to an end. It will all end,” Ning said, holding his junior apprentice-brother’s shuddering body in his arms. His junior apprentice-brother’s tears flowed onto his clothes, even onto his neck.

Ning could feel his junior apprentice-brother’s tears.

“AHHHH!!!!” An agonized cry finally ripped through the room.

“AHHH....AHHHHHHH!!!!” Northson’s cries carried a sound of utter desolation and hoarseness. He sobbed furiously, howled agonizingly.

Ning tightly held his beloved friend in his arm, listening to his cries. He could sense the bottomless, endless depths of pain, misery, grief, and despair explode forth from the cries. Ning tightly held his dear brother, his own heart shaking. He felt as though his own heart was being stabbed by knives.

Pain.

Splitting pain.

What had happened? That young white-robed youth, the one who could ignore even the threat of death and choose to follow Ning in fleeing across the world...what had changed him so?!

“I swear!!!”

“No matter who did it! No matter who they are...all of them...each of them...every last one of them...they will all die. ALL OF THEM WILL DIE!!!” Ning held his sobbing junior apprentice-brother, his own tears falling down as he swore an oath in his mind.

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